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BUDDHISM OBSERVED

Travellers, exitles and Tibetan Dharma in Kathmandu

Edited by Peter Moran

Buddhism Observed

How do contemporary Westerners and Tibetans understand not only what it means to be 'Buddhist,' but what it means to be hailed as one from 'the West' or from 'Tibet'? This anthropological study examines the encounter between Western travelers and Tibetan exiles in Bodhanath, on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, and analyses the importance of Buddhism in discussions of political, cultural and religious identity. Moran examines how Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism are 'created' in the encounters taking place in Bodhanath and how Western Buddhists come to terms with their imagined, then reified culture and religion.

Tibetan Buddhism has become Bodhanath's cultural product *par excellence*; it is not only a spectacle for foreign tourists, but a reminder of national-culture for displaced Tibetans. Special focus is given here to the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism has been presented as an object to be observed, reflected upon, and internalized by Western travelers, often at the feet of Tibetan lamas. This study examines the often invisible assumptions that structure the perception of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the practices and narratives through which Tibetan and Western Buddhist subjects are produced.

Based on extensive field research in Nepal, *Buddhism Observed* questions traditional assumptions about Buddhism and examines the rarely considered phenomenon of Western conversions to a non-Western religion. Scholars of anthropology, religion and cultural studies will find here a refreshing insight into how to approach 'other' societies, religions and cultures.

Peter Moran is director of academic programs in Kathmandu for both Trinity College, USA, and the International Honors Progam, Boston University, USA. He is also the academic director at the Center for Buddhist Studies at Kathmandu University.

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RoutledgeCurzon
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2004 by RoutledgeCurzon
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by RoutledgeCurzon
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

RoutledgeCurzon is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog for this record has been requested

ISBN 0-203-37944-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-41542-6 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0–415–32596–X (Print Edition)

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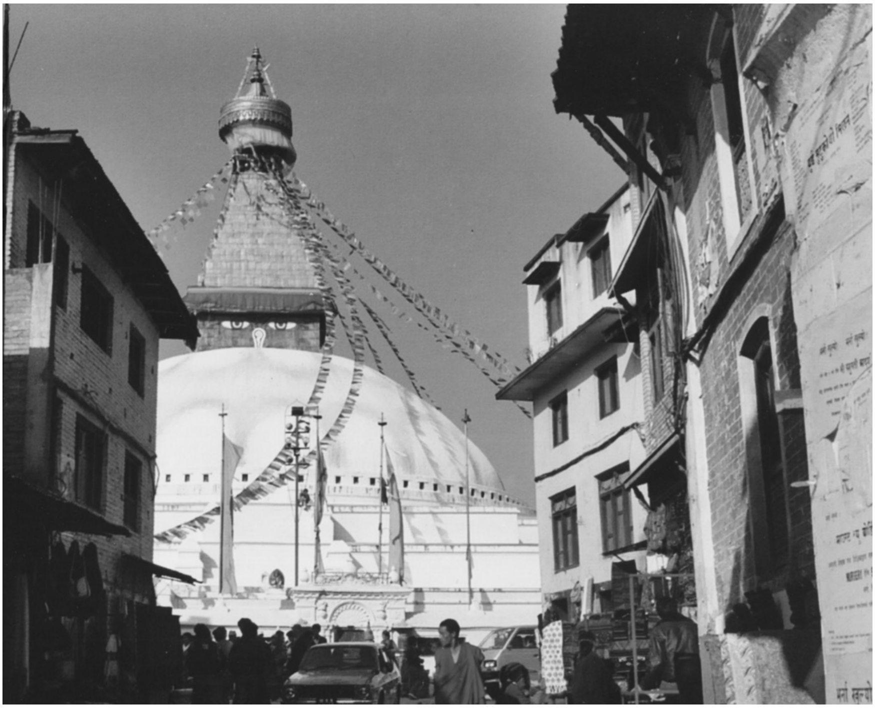


Fig 1 The entrance to the plaza surrounding the Great Chorten of Bodhanath, 1993



Fig 2 Foreign travellers on the main road of Bodhanath, 1994



Fig 3 Travellers and inexpensive goods for sale, in the plaza surrounding the Chorten, 1993



Fig 4 Tibetan ritual objects and other antiques, in a glass shop-case in Bodhanath, 1993

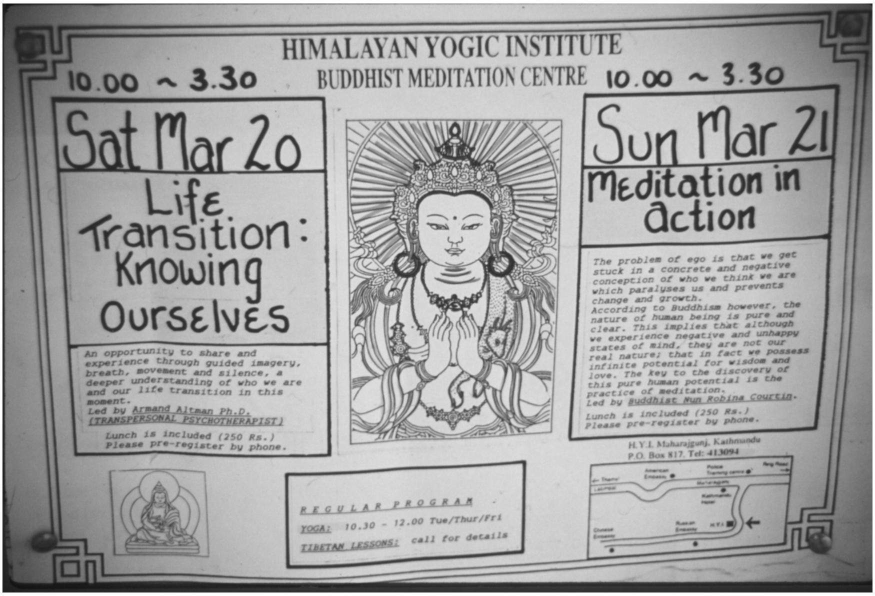


Fig 5 Wall poster seen in the tourist area of Kathmandu (Thamel), advertising upcoming events at the Himalayan Yogic Institute, 1994

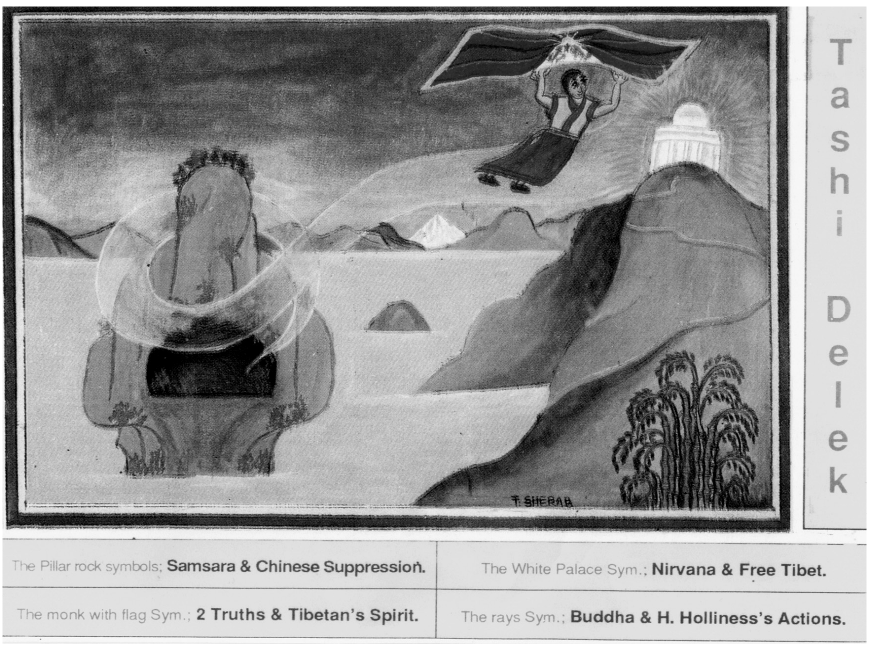


Fig 6 The Tibetan New Year greeting card, found in Bodhanath in 1993 (mentioned in Chapter 5)



Fig 7 Young Monks outside their monastery gate in Bodhanath, 1994

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of research carried out from January 1993 to June 1994, though it has its roots in my first visit to Bodhanath, Kathmandu, Nepal in 1984. Along the way I have benefited immensely from many teachers. Variously a tourist, expatriate and Western Buddhist, I feel a great debt of gratitude to those inhabitants and fellow-travelers of Kathmandu who shared their often-times very personal opinions and stories with me. In my role as an anthropologist I have critically examined their words and the implications of their narratives, and in the end it is my authorial interpretations of their statements in creating this study that must be scrutinized.

I thank the Fulbright Institute of International Education for their generous funding of this research. During 1993–1994, Penny Walker, then head of the United States Education Foundation in Nepal, was an invaluable source of help, as were all the staff members in Kathmandu. Michael Gill, who succeeded Penny, offered friendship and encouragement to see the study through to this fruition.

It is impossible to offer individual thanks to all of the travelers, expatriates and Tibetan exiles who, as my interlocutors, effectively made this work; I also respect their wishes for anonymity. I would like to single out a few people in Kathmandu, though, who helped me in many ways to either begin or follow through with my research, by offering advice, encouragement and friendship. Thank you to Ian Baker, Keith Dowman, Yangkyi Tsering, and Tashi – all of whom introduced me to the Kathmandu Valley and to the life and language of its exile Tibetans, beginning in 1984. I am very grateful for the love and the opportunity to learn from Tashi Dorje and Tsewe Lhamo, who first took me under their wings in 1986. During 1993–1994 and beyond, I was especially lucky to receive critical feedback and share more than a few laughs with Mary Bennett, Kalleen Mortensen, Bronwen Bledsoe, Tara Cahn, Tsering Drolma, Tammy Guy, Sharon Hepburn, Carrie Sengelman Hodgson, Anne Johnson, David Kelly, Stephen and Liz Malthouse, Kay Norton, Christine Thorburn, Kent Koth, Kelsang Tsetan and Yeshi Wangdi. Their ideas and suggestions made this project and myself richer.

Kathryn March and David Holmberg both offered some sage advice on interviewing and problems of fieldwork during my research period. Vincanne Adams,

whose own earlier work eloquently addresses concerns and contexts similar to this study, inspired me both through discussions and by example. I am profoundly grateful too for the friendship and patient help in Tibetan offered by Jamyang Norbu. Tenga-la taught me much about so many things, including language, lay religious practice, real humor and good will – all by example and a few choice comments.

At the University of Washington, I was happily influenced early on by E. Valentine Daniel, whose enthusiasm for Peircean theory as a torch for illuminating the work of culture has been infectious. I benefited greatly from discussions with Ann Anagnost, Susan Brownell and Ralph Litzinger, all of whom made me reconsider the traditional objects, categories and methods of ethnography. Geshe Ngawang Nornang and Leonard van der Kuijp provided me with firm foundations in colloquial and textual Tibetan respectively; they also inspired me greatly with the sheer breadth of their knowledge.

Without the guidance offered by my doctoral dissertation committee, the project would have been impossibly different and the results much poorer. My chair, Charles 'Biff' Keyes has been a consummate mentor, throughout my graduate career and beyond, thanks to his formidable knowledge of so many aspects of cultural anthropology and Buddhism, and his finely tuned critical advice. I am likewise deeply grateful to Ter Ellingson, Larry Epstein, Marilyn Ivy and Lorna Rhodes for their astute comments on earlier stages of this work and for the inspiration they provided.

The often agonizing nature of dissertation writing was made not only bearable, but at times very enjoyable by five friends who were going through the same thing. Rebecca Klenk, Jean Langford, Sara Nelson, Anne Sheeran and Sara Van Fleet all gave greatly of their time, talents and humor to make this study more successful and my life much sweeter.

I must especially thank Karchi Lama, for her insights, outbursts and sustaining help since 1999. Judy Dworin and Blu Lambert, and Sara Nelson and Matthew Lincecum provided me with so much more than hospitality on visits to the USA: fine food, better conversation and a sense of being at home. As the book reached its final form, Kathmandu friends Judith Amtzis, Anna Stobie Fairfield and Kabir Mansingh Heimsath offered significant insights and assistance. I received critical support from Grant Evans to follow through with this book project, and am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose suggestions made for a better result. Of course, all the faults on display here are mine alone. Although I am unable to name them all here, many other friends and colleagues in the USA and Nepal gave me support and inspiration to continue working on the manuscript. Thank you all more than you can know.

I am at a loss when confronted with the debt owed to my Buddhist teachers in Bodhanath. Their patience, kindness and skill at making me recognize the great value of what they teach and what I have been lucky enough to hear, can never be repaid. I especially offer profound gratitude, with deep respect, to Tulku Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche and the late Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, whom I first met in 1984, and to Dzogchen Khenpo Choga.

Finally, I thank my family, for their love over all these years. My siblings Noël, Jim and Mike; my aunts Pixie and Anita; and my amazing grandmother, Mori Magovern, were constant cheerleaders and deep sources of encouragement. My parents, James Sibbald Moran and Maureen Magovern Moran, have been my greatest supporters of all; there is simply no way to describe my gratitude. I dedicate this study to them.

1 Introduction

In April of 1994, I was walking around the great Buddhist monument, or Chorten, of Bodhanath, on the northeastern edge of Kathmandu's urban sprawl.[1] The circular monument is surrounded by a circular walkway, and then a wider plaza, both of them surrounded by a cluster of small apartment buildings, homes and shops on the ground floors. It was a hot day, and I stopped in at the area's most upscale tourist restaurant: a small ice cream shop, with air-conditioning, that featured an Italian gelato machine. The ice cream was expensive, almost 'Western' prices, and thus far beyond the means of most of the residents of Bodhanath; when it had first opened many locals seemed interested just to run in to sample the rarified cool environment and the allure of the colored creams inside the freezer case. While ordering, I met a monk named Yeshe, who was also looking over the choices presented. I asked him in Tibetan where he was from, and his answer, 'LA,' led into a longer discussion in English about his crossings back and forth from the USA to Bodhanath where his home monastery was located. Yeshe told me that he had been in LA for the past ten years, on and off, and would be returning there soon. He said he had a small Buddhist meditation center there, but also commented that it is only 'open' when lamas come from abroad to visit and to teach. Yeshe smiled, telling me that the weather in Los Angeles is not good for Buddhist study and practice; in the summer everyone goes to the beach and in the winter, skiing. We both laughed. He said that he lived in an area that the then recent riots had bordered on: lots of Korean grocers, he noted, and then he talked about the tensions between the Korean immigrants and the African-American population in a detailed way. His English was excellent, and he said that he had attended USC for two years and studied Christian theology; he was 'surprised that there was so much philosophy in Christianity.'

Yeshe asked if I was studying Buddhism in Bodhanath, and after I told him a bit about my research, he remarked, 'your writing will be controversial.' He talked about how the monasteries in Bodhanath were mostly funded by Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore Chinese – that Westerners don't give money to build monasteries in the way that other donors do. He noted that some of these Chinese Buddhists ask Tibetan lamas to perform various rituals for them; if the results are good (i.e. if their business yields are up) then they will give a

percentage of their profit to the lama or his monastery. Westerners are different, he opined. 'They pay for [Tibetan] kids to go to school.' We remarked together on the way that Bodhanath had changed, as we stood in the gelato shop and ate our cones. Before he headed out the door and into the circular plaza of Bodhanath, Yeshe commented on how expensive land in the area had become, and how 'most of these monasteries were not here ten years ago.'

* * *

Though my meeting with the monk I call Yeshe occurred toward the end of a two-year stay in Kathmandu, this passage evokes some of the translocal juxtapositions that had initially aroused my interest in 1986 and spurred my later research concerns. How had it happened that Yeshe and I should come to meet in a high-priced gelato shop, in a Kathmandu neighborhood known as Bodhanath, that seven years earlier had one restaurant for Westerners and all of two small guest houses? What of his assumption, that I was in Bodhanath to 'study Buddhism,' and my not-quite surprise when I asked him where he came from and he answered 'LA'?

Yeshe's comments on the price of land in Bodhanath, and the rapid construction of more than half of the area's twenty-plus monasteries in the span of a decade speak of a locality transformed. He attributed much of this growth to the lucrative outcomes of Tibetan lamas' travels to foreign countries, or foreign Buddhists venturing to meet them in Nepal. In such meetings, according to Yeshe, the Chinese Buddhist donors utilize the lamas' ritual prowess for instrumental aims, like averting illness or increasing the wealth of their businesses.[2] The lamas, in turn, use the funds donated to build monuments to their religion, their traditions, their culture: the monasteries we saw all around us in Bodhanath. But Yeshe also recognizes a different sort of 'donor' in the Westerners who are in Bodhanath to 'study Buddhism.' This latter group's position in Bodhanath, and their processes of identity construction as 'Buddhists,' I both identified with and had come to study.

Let me note at the outset that neither the term 'Westerners,' nor for that matter 'Tibetans,' is meant to imply that the label covers a homogeneous group of people. Both terms were used in Bodhanath as commonsensical ways of identifying others, as well as in self-identification (e.g., 'I was there along with some other Westerners'). In what follows, I sometimes use quotation marks around 'West(ern)' and 'Tibet(an)' to emphasize that the objects they represent are ontologically suspect. That is, the very terms provide coherence and stability to identities that are historically situated, contextual and far from monolithic. My hope is that instead of lulling readers into easy essentialisms, the frequent use of these terms – by myself and by my interlocutors – will make one more conscious of the assumptions, if any, behind their use.

* * *

Bodhanath has become, as one Western Buddhist remarked to me, the 'center of the mandala,' a locus around which narratives of meaning and longing are constructed by the foreign travelers who come to study 'the Dharma' (i.e. the teachings of the Buddha) or to observe Tibetan religion in its place. In comparison to Dharamsala (in Himachal Pradesh, India), which is also well known as a center for foreign study of Tibetan Buddhism and as the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile, Bodhanath is more of a backwater, and yet more profoundly transnational in character. There are far more monasteries in evidence in Bodhanath, but no international celebrity teachers on a par with someone like the Dalai Lama; there are several yearly Buddhist 'seminars' which draw hundreds of participants from all over the world, but only recently (2002) have formal centers for the academic as well as the practical study of Buddhism been established. Unlike Dharamsala, where the formerly Tibetan state-affiliated Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism clearly dominates, each one of the four main sectarian traditions of Tibet has at least three monasteries in Bodhanath.

Bodhanath, hardly a stable center, has grown immensely in size and population since my first visit there nineteen years ago. I have been unable to locate any figures, even estimates, of the population of 'Bodhanath,' partly because the area itself is indeterminately marked. Like most Tibetans I met, I use 'Bodhanath' to refer to the one or two square miles surrounding the immense Buddhist monument (*mchod-rten*, pronounced chorten; Skt. stupa) that gives the area its name. Nevertheless, in 1993, when this study was begun, I estimated that it was a more or less permanent home for some five to ten thousand people, many of whose identities are indelibly marked by their real or perceived mobility. Thus, apart from the Newar and Tamang inhabitants, some of whom have lived in the area far longer than the first Tibetan arrivals in the 1960s, there are foreign tourists in the guesthouses, foreign expatriates in some of the finer flats in the area and Tibetan exiles.[3] Even though many of the latter have been born in Nepal, there is still the presence of possibility, that one day they will return 'home.'

Consider some possible trajectories, especially the cultural and national boundary crossings, of the monk Yeshe's life. While I did not know his personal background, he was certainly old enough to have been born in Tibet, and perhaps left as a young child in 1959, following the Dalai Lama's flight. Since Yeshe had been given responsibility for a Dharma center in the USA, it is quite possible that he had studied in one of the centers of his sectarian tradition in Uttar Pradesh, India. Perhaps he had first lived in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, like so many other Tibetan exiles, before moving north. And then to Nepal? Or perhaps he was born in one of the culturally Tibetan northern border areas within Nepal, like Lo (in Nepali, 'Mustang'), and came to the capital to study with one of the Tibetan masters who made a new home near the great Chorten of Bodhanath following the Chinese invasion. Now, Yeshe facilitates the visits of such masters when they visit southern California, so that the Buddhist teachings might reach the ears of those Americans who are interested to hear it.

For some, exile is the harbinger of possibilities. That is to say, one can envision, perhaps with dread or sorrow, the track of one's life spreading out in many diverse ways, across a number of foreign lands, none of which are 'home.' One must orient toward new horizons, both literally, and metaphorically speaking (Nowak 1984: 171–175). But despite his comfort eating gelato while commenting on inter-ethnic relations in his neighborhood in Los Angeles, Yeshe is a Tibetan monk, a 'homeless one,'[4] who has retained his commitment to the horizons provided by the Dharma. The border-crossing nature of his life and the rapid rise in foreign interest in Tibetan Buddhism that he spoke of are both emblematic of our times, but are also moored in place. That is, they are made actual by the realities of life as a stateless person and the semiotic power of Tibet.

This study begins by locating Bodhanath within transnational discourses of alterity, spiritual transformation, and the national-cultural as they converge on Tibetan Buddhism as the locality's purest product. Tibet's Buddhism, as it exists in Bodhanath, is a now mysterious, now reified, now authentic, now fading object of Western desire. James Clifford (1988:4), commenting on William Carlos Williams' words, remarks on the perception that 'all the beautiful, primitive places are ruined… This feeling of lost authenticity, of "modernity" ruining some essence or source is not new.' In Bodhanath it often seemed that the search is still on for an authentic essence unsullied by modernity, and of course the exemplar of these 'authentic traditions, the pure products' (Clifford 1988: 4) is Tibetan Buddhism. So while this book is necessarily about the 'local' and its particularities, it is also, to borrow a phrase from Liisa Malkki, 'an ethnography of processes and interconnections' (1995: 1). While her work was conducted under very different conditions of displacement – in the aftermath (but not end) of unspeakable violence between Hutu and Tutsi in east Africa – her writing applies to many of my concerns as well:

> Working in social settings of displacement invites in a very direct way the further questioning of the anthropological concepts of culture, society and community as bounded, territorialized units. Similarly, one is led to question the notion of identity as a historical essence rooted in particular places, or as a fixed and identifiable position in a universalizing taxonomic order...
>
> (Malkii 1995: 2)

Despite the wider contexts that have actually created Bodhanath as a transnational crossroads, it is necessary to consider its reputation as a rooted place, a site seemingly fixed within one unique cultural and religious tradition. How does this impossibly small place come to be conceived of as such a particular kind of locality by such an assortment of people who are actually out of place there? Having first been introduced to the area around the immense Buddhist monument, or Chorten, of Bodhanath in 1984, there is no other place that so perfectly epitomizes for me the tensions and underpinnings of the translocal. Many of its monasteries receive donations from Buddhists in Taiwan, Germany, Argentina and New Zealand; some of its toniest flats and more than a few

homes with satellite dishes are the direct result of the enormously successful Tibetan carpet industry, and the Tibetan antique trade, in capturing foreign desires (and capital).

Communities have never been as neat or bounded as anthropologists sometimes imagined. Current satellite and computer technology, along with corporate capitalist requirements for labor and resource extraction make it clear that any previous soft or gray boundaries are only likely to become more permeable. Yet as so many have made clear in the now voluminous literature concerned with theorizing the 'transnational,' such permeability is experienced in radically different ways by different 'kinds' of subjects. Indeed, in the wake of Harvey (1989), Jameson (1991) and Lyotard (1989), countless scholars and media savants have commented on the 'postmodern condition' we currently inhabit, and its accompanying phenomenology (collapse of rigid temporal modalities; deterritorialization of subjects and institutions; decentering of the nation as foundational discursive practice). But with all of the concern for this emergent global phenomenon have also been reminders of the semiotic power and indeed frequent reification of the local (e.g., Massey 1992).

The desire for the other as authentic-when-in-its-place(s) has been the subject of analysis by theorists of tourism for some time (Greenwood 1977). I have particularly benefited from Dean MacCannell's groundbreaking work on the commodification of experience, and his remarks on the historical movement from pilgrimage (and early-modern sightseeing) to the sort of tourism one finds today in Bodhanath (MacCannell 1989 [1976]; cf. Graburn 1977). Here is a spiritual space imbued with a powerful (and historicized) sense of place, for according to Tibetan accounts the Chorten was built by a pious Buddhist laywoman in an era that preceded the most recent Buddha, Sakyamuni. As a result, the Chorten is said by Tibetans to be one of the three most important sites for pilgrimage in the Kathmandu valley (the other two being Swayambhunath [*phags-pa shing-kun*] and Namo Buddha [*stag-mo lus-sbyin*]). The Tibetan community has grown up around the Chorten only recently, and many of the monasteries built in Bodhanath were established there precisely because the proximity of such a holy site (*gnas*) renders the area suitable for religious activity. The Bodhanath Chorten's sheer monumentality, second only to the Shwe Dagon in Rangoon or Borobodur in size, and its location on one of the main trading routes between the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet added to its fame and popularity as a pilgrimage site (Snellgrove 1987: 365–368). Its continuing importance as a holy site for pilgrimage and worship was evidenced by the Tibetan, Ladakhi, Bhutanese, Mönpa and many Nepal-dwelling Buddhists who visited the site during the Tibetan Waterbird year (1993–1994).[5] (see figure 2)

But in current Western tourist guidebooks, what is to be seen in Bodhanath is not only its immense Buddhist monument, but the community of Tibetans who have made the area surrounding it their home. Having arrived in the Kathmandu Valley as refugees in the early 1960s, it is ironically the 'foreign' Tibetans who have given Bodhanath its 'local' flavor in the eyes of yet other travelers. Beside the Chorten itself, it is the monasteries that Yeshe referred to,

many of them built with money from Chinese (and to a lesser degree Western) patrons, that function as signs of (Tibetan) culture in-its-place, even though they are also monuments to displacement. And in fact the 'Tibetan' monasteries house not only Tibetan exiles, but predominantly (trans)'locals' from Nepal; this includes monks who identify as Newar, Tamang and Gurung, or hail from cultural groups located in several different northern border regions of Nepal, as well as Bhutan. In the last thirty years, but especially in the hyper-driven media of the past decade, the aura of 'Tibet' has often blinded Western observers to not only that country's complex history but also to its heterogeneity.

Peter Bishop's *The Myth of Shangri-La*, which I read before a trip to Bodhanath in 1991, persuaded me to consider my research as an ethnographic inquiry into imagination as social practice. That is, the encounter I witnessed occurring over Buddhism in Bodhanath was powerfully overdetermined by representations of 'Tibet' already in circulation in Western literature and media. Bishop explores the changing fascination – and fascinating changes – that 'Tibet' underwent as a place-become-sign within British and American travel writing from the late eighteenth century to 1959 (see also Lopez 1998). Semiotic relationships are of course never stable, nor are their effects uniform. However, habit, or the calcification of relationships between signs, their objects and their effects, is powerful and productive. Bishop argues that the notion of the *place* 'Tibet' as a mythical spiritual storehouse had already lost much of its currency in the Western imagination by the time the People's Liberation Army arrived in Central Tibet in 1950. Bishop's point is that the significance of Tibet becomes fragmented after 1959, and is never again tied to the land itself in the way that it had been at the turn of the nineteenth century (1989: 240–245). Following him, I suggest in chapter 2 that the locus of such a mythos has become de-territorialized, spirited away not so much to a place but to a space within Tibetan bodies, and also inhering in their cultural productions in exile.

The presence of Tibetans, especially amidst their monasteries and next to a monumental representation of the Buddha himself, imbues Bodhanath with its attraction for many Westerners today, as explored in chapters 3 and 4. Yet even this is unstable, undermined by desires forged in modernity to locate a realm where enchantment still holds sway and the rationality of commodification has not yet exerted its logic (Benjamin 1969 [1936]; Buck-Morss 1989). In chapter 3, objects in the Bodhanath marketplace seem to embody the distilled essence of that Tibetan culture that is initially so foreign to the Western observer. Chapter 4 explores the semiotic and economic functions of the monasteries of Bodhanath, for both locals and for foreign visitors. These monasteries are nodes within Buddhist economies of spiritual merit, but their presence in the modern marketplace also provokes fear about 'religion for sale' and a sell-out of the Tibetan nation.

Longing's twin, disillusionment, appears when things are discovered to be other than what was hoped for, or other than what they seem. When the valorization of the Tibetan other proceeds on the basis of Orientalist categories (timeless, pre-modern, anti-material), there is also the danger that if Tibetans fail

to deliver the uni-dimensional spiritualized goods, there is no basis through which to approach them except through scorn. How dare they not live up to a fantasy that has been projected upon them? The specificities of this Western imagining, when the figural monk as embodiment of Tibetan culture meets the flesh-and-blood monastic in Bodhanath, are the subject of chapter 5. One of the greatest disjoinders in this encounter over Buddhism is that the majority of Western Buddhists have minimal connections with ordinary Tibetans. As spirituality draws Westerners to Bodhanath, it is to the unquestioned source of the Dharma, the lamas, that Westerners proceed. Lay Tibetans are rendered peripheral in this encounter, with the result that they sometimes become little more than tropes of simple faith or its inverse, self-aggrandizing materialism, in Western Buddhists' discursive reflections on difference. For some Western travelers I spoke with, the encounter with Bodhanath – all that both the site and its Tibetan people represent – produces a paradoxical sense of homecoming even as the 'real' (but now provisional) home is left behind. This provides the thematic focus of chapter 6, as elements of Tibetan Buddhism are discussed as strangely familiar, so that Buddhist identity is capable of being experienced not as an external 'foreign' accretion, but a natural 'inner' state. Dissatisfaction with life in the West, and especially with its perceived lack of spiritual meaning, allows Buddhism to function as a means of cultural critique.

Since this field research was completed in 1994, 'Tibet' and 'Tibetan Buddhism' have entered the mainstream of American media representation like never before, with feature stories in magazines from *Esquire* to *Vanity Fair* and films by Bertolucci and Scorsese, among others. The barrage of images and Hollywood personalities involved even led *Newsweek* to reflect on the trend in May 1997: 'Tibet Gets Chic: Tibet is hip, and Buddhism is trendy, so Tibetan Buddhism is extra-cool.'[6] While the world-weary cognoscenti are already finding 'Tibet' passé, I do not want to suggest that most of the Western Buddhists whom I met were motivated by what might seem like glossy surface workovers of Tibetan Buddhism in the popular media. At the time I did my work in Bodhanath, I met many travelers and expatriates who made sincere and often very obvious commitments to Buddhism. The Tibetan Buddhism they saw, as one woman put it, was 'a way out of suffering.' In fact, it would be a misreading of the 'Tibet phenomenon' to see it as somehow merely about surface, for indeed its whole resonance, even for those who might go in for Brad Pitt as the Austrian hero of *Seven Years in Tibet*, is about a perceived depth *there* that *here* (i.e. in the 'West') is present only as lacking. This study is constantly concerned then with the intrusion of the imaginal into 'real' encounters, such that both Western Buddhists and Tibetans I spoke with ascribed surfaces and depths to the bodies of people, objects and places. What are the effects when a gazing subject assigns meanings and (mis)understandings to inner and outer objects encountered in Bodhanath? What, if anything, is at stake for Tibetans and Western travelers? Further, what might such encounters and (missed) connections tell us about how difference and identity not only come to (un)consciousness but are 'found' or naturalized in translocal contexts? In Bodhanath, searching for Buddhism (like

searching for the nation-in-exile) means that sometimes the other is read as familiar; sometimes it is the self that has become estranged. (see figure 1.2)

My central concern in this book is with those Western observers of Tibetan culture-religion in Bodhanath who seek not so much to locate the 'real' Tibet, but to enter into its central mystery, as Buddhists. To refer to the title of this book, the very act of observing has two registers. When Buddhism is observed in Bodhanath, it is not only a desiring foreign gaze that seeks to witness colorful ethnic others and essentialize them by means of religion. It is also observed in the alternate sense of the word, by other foreigners who look to Buddhism as a model for their lives and for their spiritual 'practice.' In chapter 7 I turn then to the ways in which Western Buddhists 'become' Buddhists, and observe the practices of Buddhism, though this seemingly 'natural' process is more a matter of how they are *produced* as Buddhists. This production takes place through engagement with a variety of texts, situations and people, perhaps most of all in their encounters with Tibetan religious elites or specialists: those scholars, meditation masters and 'reincarnate' teachers who sometimes appear to represent all Tibetans in Western accounts, and whose often powerful presences occlude other (Tibetan) Buddhists from view. By rejecting any identification with mere 'tourists,' as noted in chapter 3, and perhaps identifying as (Buddhist) pilgrims, such travelers and expatriates take up a position that might seem to align them with Tibetans by virtue of a shared Buddhism. But to what degree is this Buddhism 'shared'? While it is obvious that degrees of involvement with religious practices, ethics, and belief are idiosyncratic, I argue in chapter 8 that 'Buddhism' represents something quite differently imagined, approached and engaged with by most Tibetan lay people compared to their Western co-religionists.

When I interviewed Western Buddhists I often asked them if they 'would be here [in Bodhanath] if not for the Dharma'? While it is not surprising that the vast majority responded in the negative, several noting that 'the [Tibetan] culture *apart from* Buddhism' held little attraction for them, this easy separation is not so simple. I return again in chapters 8 and 9 to the slippage between 'religion' and 'culture' as it appears in the statements of both Tibetans and Western Buddhists. How do these conceptualizations – so central to pre-modern and modern discourses of difference, respectively – function in the formation of late-modern subjectivities in what is often treated as the primitive periphery?[7]

In her study of travel writing, colonialism and the frontiers of Empire, Mary Louise Pratt asks us to consider the matrices of 'transcultural contact:'

> [The term] 'contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term 'contact,' I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in

> terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.
>
> (Pratt 1992: 7)

On 'Buddhism'

As this work is consistently engaged with something called 'Buddhism,' a few notes are in order here, particularly as I provide a minimum in the way of background concerning its origins, philosophical systems, rituals, monastic organizations and history – especially with regards to non-Tibetan forms – in the text. Specifically, I highlight the discourses (textual, oral, pictoral, practical) through which Tibetan Buddhism is approached, understood and engaged with by a variety of subjects in Bodhanath. Rather than presenting an authoritative image of Tibetan Buddhism, I am concerned with how it comes to be constituted within the locality of contemporary Bodhanath, which is also enmeshed within larger contexts. Therefore I ask how 'Buddhism' yields authoritative meanings, what the nature of its authorizing discourses might be, and how Tibetans and Westerners take up positions as particular kinds of Buddhists within this field.[8]

Throughout this work, as indicated above, I focus on the play between 'Tibet' and 'Buddhism': how these signs often become conflated, and are then located as essences in persons, practices and places through the intersection of complex discourses. Nevertheless, it is significant that I have rarely, if ever, heard a Tibetan refer to their 'Buddhism' as 'Tibetan Buddhism.' In fact two monk friends, one in Nepal and one in the US, corrected me for using the term, claiming that it was useless or an 'error.' One instructed me to call it simply 'the Dharma' (*chos*, in this case meaning simply the teaching of the Buddha), or, better, 'the Dharma of the Buddha' (*Sangs-rgyas bcom-ldan-das-kyi chos*); the other monk said, 'better to say just "Buddhism." ' As he explained, to include the qualifier 'Tibetan' is to make it seem 'as if Tibetans invented something new. This is not correct. We have received the complete teachings of the Lord from the holy land of India.' If I use 'Tibetan Buddhism,' as opposed to 'Buddhism,' or (the) 'Dharma' in what follows, it is largely because of theoretical considerations that are context dependent. Yet since the very term 'Buddhism' could imply a monolithic creed, and a uniformity of practice or doctrine, it is worth remarking on this rather old problem as well.

Anthropological studies of Buddhism have frequently remarked on the different and sometimes contradictory levels of discourse surrounding Buddhist doctrine and practice in Buddhist societies. Scholars doing field research in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka have explicitly addressed the divergences between Buddhism as abstracted from canonical works (sutta and commentaries) and Buddhism as practiced by contemporary people (e.g., Gombrich 1971 ;Obeyesekere 1963 Southwold 1983; Spiro 1982 [1970]; Tambiah 1970). Even within the realm of 'Buddhism' as practiced or understood today, there are

further divisions – mostly due to gender and class positions, as well as educational levels – so that apprehending Buddhism as a single empirical phenomenon becomes increasingly difficult.

In fact, there appear to be several 'Buddhisms,' whether they are understood as historically sequential or coeval. Questions as to which is the 'authentic' or 'actual' have concerned some scholars; Southwold (1983) has argued at length that 'village Buddhism,' concerned with moral action rather than the 'belief' (or doctrine) held in esteem by elite clergy (and Western observers), is in fact 'actual Buddhism.' As Scott (1994: 189–190) observes, pronouncements on either village Buddhism or textual elite Buddhism as being 'true Buddhism' miss the point: the very existence of 'authentic' or 'true Buddhism' as an unquestioned category. Instead, we might ask through what discourses, and under what conditions, claims can be made to apprehend authentic Buddhism; further, what subject positions are thereby valorized or rendered marginal in this process.

Questions of authenticity are central to both Bodhanath Tibetans and to the foreigners who come to the community to study. Nevertheless, there are different narratives of 'authenticity,' with very different genealogies, which circulate, and interpenetrate, among Bodhanath's Tibetan and Western communities. Certainly concerns about the 'authentic' are not the sole province of Western Buddhists or Western scholars. For example, concern with authenticity has historically been closely tied to legitimacy in Tibetan Buddhist debates; religious (and often political) legitimacy is in turn often authorized through conceptions of unbroken lineal succession. In addition, what might be held up as admissible evidence in judging the authenticity of scripture, practice or spiritual teacher depends not only on precedents of tradition, but on the idiosyncrasies of a particular case.[9]

Charles Hallisey (1995) has argued that we must take care not to reify an East–West divide, so that conceptions of authenticity or historicity in (traditional) 'Asia' and the (modern) 'West' are presupposed to be inherently intransposable, always already in opposition. It has been well documented, for example, that colonial and scholarly presuppositions about Buddhism had direct effects upon indigenous understandings, as well as practices, of the Dharma in Sri Lanka (Gombrich 1971; Obeyesekere 1972; Malalgoda 1976). Hallisey notes that the changes that wrought 'Buddhist modernism' or 'Protestant Buddhism' in Sri Lanka (and later, in Southeast Asia) were not merely inflicted by colonial occupiers or Western scholastic observers on passive local Buddhists. There were areas of 'elective affinity' between Buddhist elites and foreign scholars, so rather than view this relationship as unidirectional, elements of it might be better represented as 'intercultural mimesis' (Hallisey 1995: 33, 43).[10] This is certainly the case in Bodhanath as well, where the encounter between Tibetan religious elites and Western students of Buddhism provides rich ground for a study not only in difference, but in similitude. As this study is centrally concerned with the construction of Western Buddhist subjectivities in the interstices of this space, I tend to focus on the ways in which they understand themselves to be enframed by Tibetan Buddhist 'tradition.' Yet just as elements of modernist discourses as

diverse as universal human rights, scientific empiricism, popular democracy and environmentalism are completely taken for granted by most Westerners in Bodhanath, these are also engaged with to varying degrees by contemporary Tibetan religious teachers.

To a much greater degree than the well-studied Theravada societies of South and Southeast Asia, Buddhist discourses in Tibetan tradition(s) are emphatic about the many levels from which one may approach spiritual practice, doctrinal understanding and even ethical issues (Lichter and Epstein 1983: *passim*; Samuel 1993: 3–36). It is not only lamas in Bodhanath, but shopkeepers, carpet factory owners and school teachers as well, who recognize that people vary greatly in their capacities to understand and practice the 'profound Dharma.' This is most clearly articulated and given doctrinal support by the lamas and monastics; they note that the Lord Buddha, being infinitely compassionate and completely enlightened, always taught to the capacity of the individuals who had come to hear Him speak.

The Buddhism of Tibetan societies is characterized as Vajrayana (*Rdo-rje theg-pa*), 'the adamantine/immutable way,' or 'Tantric Buddhism.'[11] The Vajrayana, which was taught by manifestations of the Buddha for those of the very highest capacity, is also the 'vehicle' (*theg-pa*) that offers the greatest variety of methods (*thabs*) for the realization of enlightenment. As such, it both contains and supersedes the more conventional teachings of the Hinayana, as well as the 'greater vehicle' of the Mahayana. According to many Tibetan teachers, the true power of the Vajrayana is in the multiplicity of paths that it recognizes as capable of delivering beings from suffering. These many methods, which are both practices and accompanying attitudes/doctrinal positions (*lta-ba*, literally 'view'), have been taught by the Buddha in accordance with the capacity and inclination of sentient beings.

The debate that once raged in anthropological studies of Theravada societies – how to make sense of the divergence between scriptural (Spiro's nibbanic, Southwold's philosophical) Buddhism and kammatic/village Buddhism – is itself addressed, and mediated, by Tibetan Buddhist authorities. Learned scholar monks, cave-dwelling yogis and wandering meditators, even the devout nomad or farmer, are all said to have their place in the religious culture of Tibet. The recognition of differential engagement with Buddhist doctrines and practices, which follows from the notion that individuals have different capacities, does not mean that all people are necessarily 'equal' as practitioners. In Bodhanath persons with specialized religious knowledge are valorized; at the same time, there is little overt condescension on the part of the specialists for the lay population. But the normative order also derives in part from the Tibetan (especially Vajrayana) emphasis on the notion of individual capacities and suitable methods mentioned earlier (i.e. obviously not everyone can become a monk or yogi), which in turn is authorized by the powerful discourses surrounding karma (Tib. *las*). As is often stated by Tibetan teachers and lay people alike, what one experiences in this life has been produced by one's past actions (i.e. *las*); what one will experience in the future is due to one's actions in the present.

But while each Buddhist social role (lay, monastic, mendicant meditator) entails a different epistemological/practical engagement with Dharma (*chos*) from the ontological or soteriological viewpoint, these divergent ways of engaging can eventually – if pursued correctly – come to the same end point. Study and scholarly pursuits are normatively sanctioned in didactic tales known by many lay Tibetans, yet it is often the pure faith – not the philosophical brilliance – of the devout lay person that leads to transcendence, as I often heard in stories repeated by Tibetan lamas to their audiences of Western students. In such tales the scholastically brilliant monk is the boastful and ignorant Buddhist when compared with the realized, though illiterate, meditator.[12]

This tension between scholar and meditator (or monastic vs. yogic orientations) and its productive resolutions are discussed in great detail by Samuel (1993). In some ways these affective poles have contradictory and competing discourses concerning normative Buddhist theory and practice. Yet both monastic and yogic practitioners are religious specialists whose engagement with the ritual and theoretical discourses of Buddhism marks them as very different from the vast majority of Tibetan lay people. Westerners and Tibetans both rely on these specialists, particularly reincarnate lamas and scholars of high caliber, as the authoritative voices of Buddhist tradition. Even so, the positions that Tibetans and Westerners take up in relation to this tradition are marked by deference, difference, and mimesis. Where does a Western subject fit within a discourse already presupposed as Other (i.e. *Tibetan* Buddhism)? Yet since 'the Dharma is for all,' as my Tibetan interlocutors so often said, regardless of race or ethnicity, how can there even be something called 'Tibetan' or 'Western' Buddhism? In order to understand this problem, the epistemic tension between the particular (culture) and the universal (religion), or between the *trans* and the *local*, I focus on ethnographic moments in which it is pronounced, repressed, and sometimes undone.

Finally, there is one point to reiterate here. I am uninterested in the chimaeric problem of locating 'authentic Buddhism,' except – and very importantly – to the degree that my interlocutors in Bodhanath are concerned with just such an endeavor. Perhaps obviously then, I am emphatically *not* concerned with the non-question of whether Tibetan lay people or Western practitioners are the 'better' or more authentic Buddhists. In my analysis I have rested on the scriptural-based, normative assumption of multiplicity discussed above: interpretation of the Dharma is many leveled, as are the practical avenues of faith. What I *am* working through in this analysis are the discourses of alterity and desire that give shape to the Buddhist encounter in Bodhanath. For despite the sphere of religion or universal Dharma in which it takes place, this encounter too is the work of cultured habits and histories.

A note on Tibetan usage and transcription

The treatment of Tibetan language terms is a notorious problem in writing like this: does one focus on providing glosses for pronunciation for the benefit of the

non-specialist, or use a transcription of the Tibetan word that allows those familiar with the language to immediately identify a given term? If a particular term or name does not feature prominently in the dissertation, I have chosen to follow Turrell Wylie's (1959) system for transcription: the word will appear in italics, except in the case of proper names. I have provided approximate pronunciations together with transcriptions for popularly used terms or for words that had common currency among Western Buddhists in Nepal. For example, the indigenous term denoting a religious teacher or spiritual superior (*bla-ma*, pronounced 'lama') will only appear as 'lama' henceforward. The term for a religious empowerment or initiation (*dbang*, pron. 'wang,' that is wahng), well known to Western Buddhists in Bodhanath, will likewise be rendered according to its pronunciation after its first appearance in the text. Similarly, the proper names of contemporary Tibetan teachers will be introduced with both Wylie transcription and pronunciation guides, but further references to them will be as their names are spoken. At the risk of offending specialists, I have not used diacritical marks for Sanskrit renderings. In most cases I have not provided the Sanskrit (Skt.) equivalents for Tibetan religious vocabulary, except in cases where the Sanskrit is so much more widely known or, again, is in use among Tibetan teachers and their Western disciples in Bodhanath.

2 Emanating bodies in the transnational terrain

> Previously Tibetan religion, as we have seen, had been embedded in its landscape; consistently imagined as belonging to its *place*. By the middle of the twentieth century this position was almost completely reversed: it was not the landscape that provided Western fantasies of Tibet and its religion with coherence, but its esoteric religion that gave Tibet and its landscape imaginative difference and significance. Even Tibetan religion *as a whole* had ceased to be the object of fascination; now only the spiritual masters and their most advanced techniques excited Western fantasies.
>
> (Bishop 1989: 244)

Before embarking on a discussion of the monasteries, shops and inns of Bodhanath, Kathmandu, where Euro-American travelers and expatriates come face to face with three-dimensional Tibetans, here I examine aspects of the larger conditions and contexts that inform such encounters. This includes the condition of exile for Bodhanath Tibetans, with its attendant pressures to represent the nation and stabilize national-cultural essences so that Tibetan-ness might be reproduced outside the homeland. It also includes the translocal context in which representations of Tibet make their way across international boundaries to the homes of contemporary 'Western' readers, viewers, travelers-to-be.

In an attempt to draw out these broader theoretical features, I am concerned here with one of the most profoundly 'significant' – and esoteric – aspects of Tibetan religious, political and cultural life: the phenomena of 'reincarnate lamas,' or 'emanation bodies' (Tib. *sprul-sku*, pronounced *tulku*) and their place in today's global landscape. Although the Tibetan term 'tulku' is more literally and properly translated as 'emanation body' – or 'emanation' as shorthand – in what follows I use the English designation 'reincarnate lama' as well since it has developed greater usage among Western commentators (including Buddhists). Samuel rightly discerns that the very term 'lama has developed a number of overlapping areas of meaning' (1993: 280), but in general it refers to a spiritual adept or religious teacher. Therefore, the majority of monks are not lamas, many lamas are not recognized tulkus, and all tulkus are lamas, at least potentially. The tulku is the acme of Tibetan Buddhist social and religious roles, as well as a special order of being.

While a tulku can be the recognized rebirth (properly speaking this is referred to as *yang-srid*) of a deceased spiritual master, the emanation of a Buddhist deity, or both, he (or very rarely, she) is explicitly *not* an average Tibetan.[1] Still, the figure of the tulku has appeared in a great many news articles, 'human interest stories' and even major Hollywood films as representative of 'Tibet' in several different configurations. It is not only the figural tulku that moves across international borders via satellite, modem and celluloid; contemporary Tibetan tulkus have been among the most mobile of their countrymen, often bringing and representing Tibetan Buddhism to eager audiences in the West. Indeed, it seems nearly impossible for any tulku to escape his powerfully significant, and signifying, role. Thus, the tulku as sign has provided an entrée to the semiotic practices involving 'Tibet' since the early 1990s.[2] Very importantly for what follows, an investigation into the significance of the tulku also allows me to implicitly introduce the geography of Bodhanath in the widest sense possible. That is, the figure of the reincarnate lama demonstrates both the illusion of – and, in some cases, the allusion to – 'the local.'

First, it is necessary to understand how 'Tibet' and 'Tibetan Buddhism' function as representations – or signs – within a particular semiotic. Words (as signs, that is as pointers to something else) not only convey certain ideas and images to an interpreting consciousness, they can also produce particular emotional states or intentions to act in those who are confronted with their representation.[3] For example, that 'Tibet' as a linguistic symbol is conventionally agreed upon in the English-speaking world to stand for an actual place tells us little. But this symbol itself is part of a whole constellation of other signs that it refers to and that refer to it, signs that become mutually referential over time, linked by the force of interpreting habit and by the power of narrative. Thus, 'Buddhism' and 'Dalai Lama' both evoke 'Tibet' as well as a host of other meanings. And of course many of the images, conceptualizations and feelings that come into the mind upon hearing the word 'Tibet' are drawn from contemporary popular media: newspaper stories, film, radio and television, novels and non-fiction. Desire for something that Tibet represents, and imagining just what Tibet might be like – the contours of that desire – also operate through the play of signs. Stock images and similar narrative tropes almost inevitably emerge when I discuss Tibet with acquaintances, apparently an indication to me that my discussant knows what this Tibet place is all about: lamas, monasteries, mountains and, especially these days, Chinese oppression. Professions of fascination with the place and its 'remoteness' or 'spirituality' are often offered ('I've always wanted to go there, since I was young, and I have no idea why').

Comments like these beg the question, what is the place of 'virtual Tibetans'[4] in such a system of signs, and how might representations of 'Tibet' and 'Tibetans' inform the desires of Euro-American audiences for a specific kind of exotica, thus spilling over into – or even prompting – those interactions taking place on the streets of Kathmandu, Dharamsala and Lhasa? I will return to this broad question in other parts of the study.

In the chapter that follows, I briefly examine the ontological status of the

tulku in the authoritative discourses of Tibetan Buddhism. I sketch the ways that the tulku operated within Tibetan political and religious structures, and then concentrate on how the condition of exile has produced new practices and new readings of the 'emanating' body of a spiritual master.[5] Next, I trace some of the journeys that recent emanation bodies have made across national, racial and cultural boundaries. Specifically, how have 'foreign', i.e. non-Tibetan, bodies been manifested by (previously) Tibetan lamas in unsettling exception to Kipling's famous (and miscegenist?) essentialism, 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.' What happens to ideas of cultural essence in such a condition of spiritually soaked hybridity?

The tulku: ontology and practice

How to discuss what seems so fantastic – the rebirth of a deceased master appearing in the form of a newborn – without reifying its tremendous alterity to an American audience, and yet without making it more banal or unreflected upon than it is? In Tibetan discursive practices, the tulku is taken for granted *and* other; remarkable *and* not worth mentioning. Let me begin where I began, when the magical idea of an 'emanation body' that I had encountered in books on Tibetan Buddhism became quite literally domesticated.

For about seven months in 1986–1987 I lived with a Tibetan family in Kathmandu whose three-year-old son Wangyal was, they told me when we were first introduced, 'a special boy.' Ama-la (mother) and Pa-la (father) did not use the word 'tulku' with me in the beginning, always reiterating their son's identity, always in English, as 'special,' probably assuming that I wouldn't grasp what the Tibetan word connoted. Their son was different from me – the young American in the house – in so many obvious ways, but he was different from them too, as his identification as 'special' made clear. Wangyal wore a tiny maroon 'skirt' (*gsham-thab*, or lower monastic robe) with a yellow silk vest – just like a monk – and around his neck were numerous *sung-dü* (*srung-mdud*, consecrated 'protection cords') along with a miniature *phur-bu* (ritual dagger). I had heard that he was a tulku, the rebirth (*yang-srid*) of a Buddhist master, from an American friend who had directed me to the family as a lodger.

In one sense, spiritual hierarchy is taken for granted in Buddhist notions of cause and effect, in that within each lifetime some people are more virtuous, more capable in spiritual matters and in book learning, more compassionate and less self-centered, than are others. Alternately, many people have no inclination to listen to, study or practice any of the Buddha's doctrine; without this it is impossible to even enter the soteriological path that Buddhism offers. Such capacities and conditions, which are specific to each living being, are not random, but derive from the logic of karma ('act' or 'action'), in which one's past actions produce today's results, so that the past *is* present in very concrete ways. When it comes to reading the signs that announce a tulku's presence, I, like most ordinary people, was illiterate. Indeed, if there seems to be one rule about the recognition process, it is quite simply that high-ranking emanations are

able to recognize their own; they see special qualities with special eyes.

In Tibetan religious discourse, the tulku may be compared or equated with the 'hero' (*dpa'-bo*), or bodhisattva (*byang-chub sems-dpa'*), who is motivated by radical compassion and the force of previous vows to free all beings from suffering, and thus emanates a form suitable to the environment he has chosen to take rebirth in. The bodhisattva thus seems to be the very paragon of agentive action. Yet the notion that the bodhisattva – or any other sentient being – is possessed of a permanent and dualistic self (i.e. a 'real' self housed within the body, *or* coterminous with the body) is explicitly denied in Buddhist formulations. According to Buddhist doctrine, any notion of an individual 'self' (*bdag*) is in fact a fallacious reification of a processual self. It is this continuous stream of mental events that is mis-recognized as an independent 'I,' when in fact it has no essential unity, permanence or characteristics. In fact, though this tulku appears to us, he is (much as we ourselves are) nothing more than a momentary appearance from the perspective of 'ultimate truth' (*don-dam-gyi bden-pa*).

Sprul, the first part of the compound word tulku, connotes not only 'emanation,' but also magical apparition or appearance. Ultimately it is not a concrete 'individual,' but an emanation of compassion and wisdom activity in physically apparent form. Ordinary beings, however, remain trapped in the Cycle of birth, existence, death and rebirth (Skt. samsara) by their agentive history (i.e. their karma) and their accrued habitual tendencies (*bag-chags*). From an elite Buddhist perspective, such tendencies derive first and foremost from the misapprehension of the nature of Being and beings, a wrong-headed assumption along the lines of *cogito ergo sum* that tulkus as spiritually realized beings do not share. They continue to act, but have seen through the incorrect assumption of a stable and unitary self; they appear as powerful agents working to save *apparently* suffering beings, even as they know that in truth, such appearances are mere convention.

The precise ontological status of an emanation body is not easily summed up, nor is there perfect agreement among various Tibetan doctrinal schools as to how such beings are best understood. There is neither the room, nor do I have the skill to elucidate these distinctions here; a summation will have to suffice.[6] In short, the Tibetan term 'tulku,' emanation body, refers to one among the tripartite division of Buddha 'bodies' (Tib. *sku*, Skt. kaya).[7] The tulku is the form Body of the Buddha – His physical manifestation in this world – whereas the *longs-sku* and *chos-sku* aspects are more subtle 'bodies,' analogically paired with the Speech and Mind respectively of the Enlightened One. *Sprul-sku*/tulku thus refers to that aspect of the actual nature of things (*chos-nyid*) which appears to our deluded perceptions as most concrete or physically apparent. The three 'bodies' therefore form a sort of continuum ranging from the most grossly material (the emanation-body aspect) to the most subtle and immaterial (the *chos-sku*, Dharma-body aspect, associated with the Buddha's Mind).

Unlike the other two 'bodies' from which it proceeds, the tulku form is physically apparent and accessible to the suffering beings in the world. While the *longs-sku* (Skt. Sambhogakaya), or 'enjoyment body' manifestations, which include such high-level bodhisattvas as Sgrol-ma (Skt. Tara), 'Jam-dpal-dbyangs

(Skt. Manjusri), and Spyan-ras-gzigs (pronounced Chenresi, Skt. Avalokitesvara), possess bodies of rainbow light and are only rarely perceptible to exceptional human beings, these same bodhisattvas may emanate a human (or other) form as a tulku (*sprul-sku*), in order to benefit others. There are also human beings, who through the perfection of spiritual practices have achieved the status of a lower-level bodhisattva; as such these great beings return again and again in various guises (also *sprul-sku*) to continue their work. The current Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet is an example of both: the entire line of Dalai Lamas is believed to be an emanation of the great Bodhisattva Chenresi, but each individual is also, of course, the reincarnation of his predecessor (in this case the Thirteenth Dalai Lama).

The entire system is driven by the 'specialness' of the being that is capable of choosing its own rebirth. Further, a tulku is believed to take the particular body that he does in the knowledge that *this* emanation body is what will be of most benefit at a given point in time. As I heard several contemporary tulkus in Bodhanath explain, it is of utmost importance to bear this in mind in the face of *apparently* controversial or dismaying incidents that concern emanations.[8] According to the normative discourse of Tibetan Buddhism, tulkus manifest due to a logic that is inscrutable from the point of view of ordinary beings; their sheer alterity and their always already-announced 'special' status likewise lend an opacity to all of their activity.

One of the best known examples of a tulku behaving in ways seemingly unsuitable to his office is the much-beloved Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs-dbyangs rGya-mtsho (CE 1683–1706?). Ultimately his refusal to comport himself as his scholarly predecessor had – especially his rejection of monastic vows – won him the enmity of powerful political foes (Manchu emperor, Mongol chieftain and various Tibetan nobles) and cost him his life (see Aris 1988: 156; part 2, *passim*). What is interesting is that the Sixth Dalai Lama's odd lifestyle endeared him to much of the Tibetan public – as it continues to today – and in no way took away from his status as the highest-ranking emanation in Tibet. The logic of the tulku, if accepted, is capable of explaining away any seeming anomalies. Ultimately, the Sixth Dalai Lama's legitimacy was reestablished in Tibetan historical narratives and his detractors exposed for their purely political motivations. His comportment was interpreted as a sign of his Tantric mastery, and his renowned love songs were re-read as songs of spiritual realization. In short, we are unable to fathom what motivates the tulku beyond his/her goal to bring benefit to suffering beings: why he/she might behave in a *particular* way or take rebirth in a *particular* body. The great twentieth-century scholar Dudjom Rinpoche notes, 'emanations act, in the manner of apparitions, on behalf of those requiring training, referring solely to the unique circumstances of the situation at hand' (Dudjom 1991: 594).

All of a specific tulku's actions are completely overdetermined by the figure of the tulku. This inscrutability is of course directly related to the tulku's alterity, but it also allows for the possibility that *all others* are unknowable in relation to a self. In fact, this is exactly what Tibetan lamas (and a few lay people) have said to

me on several occasions: only a Buddha himself can possibly see into the hearts of beings; only a Buddha can truly understand the workings of causes and effects that produce everything we call 'this world.' At the same time, few Tibetans are so naive as to believe that the tulku system is utterly beyond the manipulation of corrupting human agents. Yet because the significant power of the tulku is authorized by religious discourses, too often the political ramifications of the tulkus' role in Tibetan societies – their presence amidst, and their manipulations of, structures of power – have been ignored in Western media representations.[9] Further, although tulkus have always emanated within political and economic structures as signs of religious power and authority, I argue that today their presence may register in new ways, both among Tibetans, and among Euro-American observers.

During my stay in Kathmandu in 1993–1994, a divisive controversy erupted in the Tibetan exile community over the search for the legitimate rebirth of the Sixteenth Karmapa, who had passed away in Chicago in 1981. The Karmapa line of tulkus – the lords of the Karma Kagyu sect – has a long history in which political influence and spiritual power were combined; the prestige of the holder of this lineage is probably second only to the Dalai Lama and perhaps the Panchen tulku.[10] This contemporary controversy seemed to cast two of the highest ranking tulkus of the Karma Kagyu sect[11] (*chos-lugs*; literally, 'system of Dharma'), the Sixteenth Karmapa's regents, Tai Situ Rinpoche and Shamar Rinpoche, into opposed positions, and each man eventually recognized a different boy as their teacher's rebirth. The matter of the true incarnation should presumably have been settled within the Karma Kagyu sect itself, yet this case seemed to demand mediation. The Tai Situpa went to the Dalai Lama in 1992 for affirmation of the boy he had located in Tibet, a boy that was later endorsed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the Seventeenth 'Living Buddha' Gyalwang Karmapa, the first high-ranking tulku ever to be formally accepted and recognized by the communist Chinese government.[12]

Not only was there a tremendous fortune at stake in this controversy ('assets held by the Kagyupa Buddhists' being estimated at $1.2 billion by *Time*, 4 April 1994), but there was also the course of the sect's future to worry about. Many Tibetans look to the Gyalwang Karmapa as the head of their spiritual lineage, and the Karma Kagyu sect has been perhaps more successful than any other Tibetan sectarian tradition in establishing itself abroad; there are some four to five hundred Karma Kagyu religious centers worldwide (*Himal*, Nov./Dec. 1992: 45). The spectacle of two senior lamas of the same sect in public opposition over their candidates, in a debacle that included the Dalai Lama, the Indian government, the specter of Bhutanese and Chinese involvement, as well as deliberate falsehood, cover-ups and accusations of money or prestige-seeking, was carried in the Indian and Nepalese presses, as well as in the West. This wide publicity was perhaps most troubling of all to some of the Tibetans in Bodhanath – especially, but not exclusively, to those who identified as Karma Kagyupa.

In 1992, *The Karmapa Papers* was published by apparently Western backers of the beleaguered Shamar Rinpoche. The 180-page English-language book

acknowledges neither authors nor editors by name, but presents a large number of official and personal documents (in both Tibetan and in English translation) concerned with the entire controversy – the very type of documents that would never have been collected and then publicly distributed in pre-exile Tibet. While its intent may have been to 'shed some light on the intricate and often confusing events of Tibetan society' (*ibid.*: 3), by examining the (mis-)recognition of the Seventeenth Karmapa, it also dramatically indicates the ways in which Western Buddhists have become drawn into the political as well as spiritual activities of their Tibetan teachers. *The Karmapa Papers* indexes an attitudinal shift among some Western Buddhists toward Tibetan spiritual masters, a recognition that lamas also operate in the political dimension. 'It has become very obvious that "a Tibetan Rinpoche" does not automatically mean an enlightened person. Since in this respect the Western approach has been quite naive so far, this examination [i.e. the book] might not always be pleasant' (*ibid.*).

The uproarious controversy over two 'enthroned' Karmapas had faded by the late 1990s (even if its effects have certainly not).[13] What continued to provoke comment among Tibetan Buddhists and others was that the officially recognized, and far more popularly supported, Seventeenth Karmapa was residing at his ancestral seat in Central Tibet under the jurisdiction of the PRC. His presence there, and what this signified for Tibetans-in-exile, as well as for Beijing, prefigured the difficulties awaiting other important emanations as they take up new bodies within the borders of the 'Motherland.'[14]

Thus the case of the Panchen tulku, which received a great deal of attention after the discovery of this important lama's rebirth in Tibet was announced by the Dalai Lama in May of 1995. As the most important line of rebirths in the Gelugpa sect, save the Dalai Lamas themselves, the Panchen tulkus controlled one of the largest labor and tax bases in pre-1950 Tibet from their seat at Tashilhunpo (*Bkra-shis lhun-po*) monastery in Shigatse. Their history is marked by both close and highly conflictual relationships with the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa; the last incarnation, the Tenth, was courted by China and remained behind to work with – and antagonize – Beijing when the Dalai Lama fled in 1959.[15] Although the Tenth Panchen proved difficult for Beijing to control and has, especially since his death, been seen by many Tibetans as a patriot, the PRC no doubt believes that to control his young incarnation would augur well for public relations in Tibet. In addition, there had historically been a mutually reinforcing relationship between the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, in which the senior of the two is often called upon to recognize the other's rebirth and provide educational and spiritual guidance to the junior party. Thus, for Beijing to dominate the child Panchen tulku is to wield power over the recognition of the next Dalai Lama, whose current incarnation is a state enemy.

The Dalai Lama's official recognition of a Tibetan boy, Gendhun Choekyi Nyima (Dge-'dun Chos-kyi Nyi-ma), as the Eleventh Panchen tulku came after several years of searching and ritually prescribed inquiry by senior lamas from the Panchen's home monastery in Tibet. While the Chinese authorities supported this search, Beijing was unaware that some of the lamas had been

forwarding information about the candidates to the Dalai Lama in India (Hilton 1999). Hence his official recognition of Gendhun Choekyi Nyima in May 1995 preempted the Chinese government's own announcement of the boy's discovery. Angry at the Dalai Lama's proclamation and intent on limiting the power of the 'splittist Dalai clique,' Chinese officials denied the authority of the very lamas from the Tashilhunpo monastery that they had initially relied upon for their information. These lamas were now denounced as collaborators, and their young candidate Gendhun Choekyi Nyima and his family disappeared. A new selection procedure directed by the Chinese State yielded the 'true Panchen' later that year (*LA Times* Nov. 29, 1995; *NY Times* March 26, 1996).

This 'true Panchen,' Gyaincain Norbu (Rgyal-mtshen Nor-bu),[16] was enthroned in his traditional seat at the monastery of Tashilhunpo in the second largest city of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, yet he has never taken up residence there. Thus far Gyaincain Norbu remains in Beijing, while the Chinese government attempts to legitimize his status by decree and ceremonial investiture, by circulating stories and photographs of him, and by attempting to erase any memory of the other candidate (a particularly impossible task) among Tibetans. This other boy, the 'Dalai Lama's candidate,' also lives in or near Beijing, presumably under house arrest for the rest of his life, or at least until he can be rendered insignificant. Ironically, the representational power of this emanation is even greater now that he is, in the Dalai Lama's words, the world's youngest political prisoner. By being denied the Panchen's throne, he, even more than the Karmapa before him, has come to embody a significance far in excess of the merely 'spiritual' qualities of his predecessors, as I will detail below.

* * *

The previous Panchen and Karmapa tulkus' high spiritual status also made them potentially powerful in worldly terms. Each left behind devoted lay followers and scores of monasteries (or in the Karmapa's case, other 'spiritual centers', *chos-tshogs*, in the Americas, Europe, Taiwan, etc.) under their spiritual purview, and of course the revenue that such activities might generate. In contrast, the circumstances surrounding the recognition of the 'special boy' I had lived with in 1986 is closer to the norm for contemporary Tibetan tulkus. Because his incarnation lineage was not one that had great historical depth, enormous influence (as the head of a sectarian lineage, for example) or great economic holdings, he was still accorded respect by local Tibetans, but did not attract much attention. Wangyal is now, at age eighteen, just one tulku among several others in one of Bodhanath's largest monasteries. For many tulkus without illustrious pedigrees it is not until later in life, when they are able to prove their own *individual* mettle through skill in scholarship, ritual arts or prolonged retreats that their status will increase.

There is an obvious correspondence between the economic activity of important lamas (often carried out in their name by retainers) and their political power (Samuel 1993; Goldstein 1973, 1989). In pre-1950 Tibet, economic power was

largely derived from control of estates, which in turn meant the control of human labor (as opposed to the mere ownership of land *per se*); in such a situation the distinction between political and economic power is tenuous at best. The spiritual influence that a lama yields is at least analytically separable from this eco-political power, and indeed, in Tibet and in exile today, lamas no longer directly control agricultural or pastoralist populations. Still, the perceived spiritual qualities of a lama, and most especially a tulku, make them worthy of veneration and objects of economic largesse in the eyes of devotees. This 'spiritual influence' is a form of power that easily spills over the neat category of 'religion;' it is capable of producing effects that are obviously felt in the economic and political practices of individuals and groups. This power – or moral authority – derives both from the elevated ontology of a reincarnate lama, as well as from a tulku's own personal charismatic leadership.

The transnational character of such influence, and its movement across national and ethnic boundaries, are most pronounced in the cases of those high-ranking tulkus who went into exile following the Dalai Lama in 1959, and like him continued to exercise great spiritual influence on their sects' members. For example, the Sixteenth Karmapa and another renowned teacher, the previous Dudjom Rinpoche, were two of the most senior Tibetan lamas in exile.[17] Their lives were marked by frequent international migrations after leaving their homeland, they established countless interpersonal relationships with non-Tibetan disciples, and left behind hundreds of international religious centers. The Karmapa's seat in exile was in Sikkim, yet he traveled widely and died in the United States in 1981. Dudjom Rinpoche lived in both India and Nepal before finally settling in France in the 1980s, where he later passed away. When I attended the enthronement of his tulku in Kathmandu in 1993, I was struck by the make-up of the crowd. Not only were there hundreds of Tibetan monks and lay people in the crowd, there were also hundreds of devotees from North America, Europe, Bhutan and Taiwan.

It has been the controversy surrounding the installation of a Chinese appointed Panchen tulku – the senior-most tulku to remain in Tibet after the Chinese invasion – that has had the widest political ramifications and garnered the greatest international attention of all. Unlike the problems of succession in the Karmapa case, the Panchen controversy has gathered significance precisely because of what has come to be seen as the *overt* intrusion of an explicitly political and foreign power (the PRC government) into a matter that is read as 'spiritual' – and Tibetan – in nature. In this semiotic field, as Lopez has suggested, 'China must be debased for Tibet to be exalted; in order for there to be an enlightened Orient, there must be a despotic Orient' (1994: 40). The homologies between Tibet and spirituality, and the PRC and godless bureaucracy, are exemplified in the title of an October 1, 1990, *New York Times* article: 'Lamas Seek the Holy Child, but Politics Intrude.' The author, Nicholas Kristof, discusses the search for the Tenth Panchen Rinpoche's reincarnation in Tibet, and clearly notes the Chinese state's interest in the Eleventh Panchen, but also registers Tibetans' fears of what this interest might portend. Five years later,

following the Chinese rejection of the 'Dalai Lama's choice,' Tempa Tsering, spokesman for the Tibetan government-in-exile, insisted that:

> The reincarnation of the Panchen Lama is a religious matter, and Tibetans everywhere will only recognize the one [child] that the Dalai Lama has recognized … China's government does not believe in religion, does not have the authority to name the reincarnation, and has no international credibility.
>
> (*LA Times*, November 29, 1995)

Here again one finds the semiotic linkages – the mutual referentiality – between the Tibetan 'nation,' 'religion' and 'sovereignty.' Each functions as a sign that has come to represent or reference the others, so that religious *and* national sovereignty become habitually interwoven in much public discourse in both the West and among Tibetans in exile.

If the Karmapa tulku is less important in the Tibetan nationalist political landscape than the Panchen emanation, it is because the latter's lineage has historically been recognized by, and in turn recognizes, the Dalai Lamas (who have been, since the seventeenth century, the titular heads of the Tibetan 'state'). In the controversy over two claimants to the Karmapa's throne, some of the most persistent and damning rumors surrounding the tulku candidates (or their backers) have alluded to the involvement of *outsiders* (especially the Chinese; *Karmapa Papers* 1992). In fact, outside agents seeking to influence the ascension of particular tulku candidates have a long precedent in Tibetan history, as does the obverse practice of Tibetan lamas discovering tulkus among politically important 'foreign' populations. A cursory glance at the best documented line of emanations, the Dalai Lamas, reveals the jockeying by important political and religious factions – Tibetan, various Mongol 'tribes,' and Manchu – seeking to place their boy on the throne (Aris 1988: part two; Samuel 1993: 527–531).

Even as tulkus manifest in *non-Tibetan* bodies – perhaps to gain political leverage – there is a tension, an anxiety about foreigners, which variously surfaces in the contemporary cases of the Karmapa and Panchen tulkus. Concern about the intentions of the Chinese government led many Tibetans in Bodhanath to fear that the Seventeenth Karmapa himself or the high-ranking tulkus involved in his selection process might be manipulated by Beijing to their own ends. Several Tibetans told me that in fact the entire controversy involving two claimants to the Karmapa's throne, their high-lama patrons at each other's throats, and the resulting scandal, had been produced and directed by Beijing so as to damage the world reputation of Tibetans and Buddhism. The vociferous condemnation of the Chinese-appointed Panchen is perhaps only the most blatant example of an anxiety produced when a tulku embodies not just the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, but the essence of the nation as well.

Bodies signifying the nation

In the current situation of exile and Chinese occupation, the disappearance of 'the Dalai Lama's choice' for Panchen Lama, as Gendun Choekyi Nyima has been labeled by the Western press, has made the boy a martyr for the Tibetan nation. Meanwhile, the ascension of Beijing's 'soul boy' Gyaincain Norbu to the throne of the Panchen has provided Tibetan nationalists with their fears made flesh – political propaganda being put in the mouth of a spiritual babe:

> 'The Communist Party and government hope the 11th Panchen Lama will study well, grow up healthy and inherit the patriotic spirit of previous Panchen Lamas,' the party chief [Jiang Zemin] who is also state president, told the boy [Gyaincain Norbu] in a meeting in Beijing's Zhongnanhai compound, the heart of party rule …
>
> China's action has posed Tibet's deeply religious inhabitants with a stark choice – – the boy with the blessing of China's ruling party or Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the six-year old named last May by the Dalai Lama …
>
> 'Thank you to the party and to President Jiang,' the boy said softly in Tibetan … 'I will study hard and be a patriotic Living Buddha who loves religion,' he said.
>
> (Macartney 1996)

A similar meeting held between Jiang and the earlier recognized Karmapa was reported in *Newsweek* on April 24, 1995. This boy, Ugyen Thinley Dorje, is the candidate that the Dalai Lama endorsed, and was the first 'Living Buddha' (an English translation of the Chinese term for tulku) recognized by Beijing since the Revolution. In this case, the state recognition of the Seventeenth Karmapa interestingly followed the Dalai Lama's imprimatur, while just a few years later the PRC government condemned the Dalai Lama's meddling in the Panchen case and rejected his 'choice' out of hand. At the time of their meeting, the president of the PRC exhorted the boy Karmapa to be patriotic, yet in his response to Jiang 'the Karmapa allegedly blurted out: "Who is this man?"' *Newsweek* saw Tibetan defiance in this comment, wherein the Karmapa and Jiang – standing for their respective 'nations' – come face to face with their Other. While many of the Tibetans I spoke with in Kathmandu in 1993 were concerned about the Karmapa's ability to remain free of the Chinese taint, most were also optimistic in this regard.

In December 1999, this optimism gave way to rejoicing, as Tibetans in Kathmandu learned that the Seventeeth Karmapa had made a nearly unbelievable escape out of Tibet and had safely reached Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile. For several Tibetans I spoke with in the days following the news, it was the most hopeful event since the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama in 1989. And the note it sounded was in very nearly the same register: a real gesture of independence, a defiant longing for freedom, and a refusal to be co-opted by Chinese state communism. Opinion

is quite different as regards the Chinese-installed Panchen Lama. I have yet to speak with any Tibetan who regards the boy as anything more than an illegitimate puppet, cruelly used by the Chinese government.

In the international arena the boy tulkus have become emblematic of wider issues; in fact I would argue that the tulku as a sign of innate spirituality has in turn become an index of the very essence of Tibetan 'culture' itself. As 'Tibet's God-King,' the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has represented his entire nation for Tibetans and for the world at large; now these boys have also come to signify 'Tibet,' but with a difference. While the Dalai Lama brings attention to the very condition of exile, crossing countless borders in his search for international support for a free Tibet, the Panchen tulku and, until his exodus, the Karmapa, spoke to the other side of diaspora: those who are left behind, those who still inhabit the homeland, those whose mobility is not out of control like the refugee, but is rather overcontrolled or denied (cf. Malkki 1995). Both the (now missing) Panchen and the (now in exile) Karmapa tulku were found in Tibet, and as such they become indexical signs of the Tibetan homeland; their very presence in Tibet suggests Tibetan religion and culture existing, as they should, in their place of origin. Indeed, the conflation between culture and religion is easily incorporated (literally embodied) by the tulkus, and it is this matrix of the national-cultural (Ivy 1995: 3–4) linked with spiritual essence that, like the boys themselves, has become hostage to the Chinese state. Were the boys to be merely 'religious figures' as the Chinese maintain (and cannot afford to admit otherwise), there would be no problem. It is precisely their embodiment of a national-cultural/religious 'Tibet' that makes them so valuable, and dangerous.

Like the Dalai Lama before them, these boys have become foci for Chinese and Tibetan attempts to control the immensely emotional semiotic processes whereby 'religion,' 'nation' and 'culture' are defined and their power harnessed. If we read the missing Panchen tulku and the escaped Karmapa as living signs of a national Tibetan identity, then media accounts of their ascension to their spiritual thrones, their interactions with Chinese government interlocutors, and their disappearance (or escape) become accounts of the Tibetan national-cultural essence as writ on children's bodies. Witness the *New York Times* headline of its March 26, 1996 article on the missing Panchen tulku, Gendun Choekyi Nyima: 'One Boy's Arrest Shows a Broad Repression in Tibet,' and the essay's single bold-faced sidebar, 'A six-year-old, chosen as a religious leader, is held by Beijing.'

We can read news accounts referring to the Karmapa's recognition and his flight into exile eight years later, as well as the search for the Panchen tulku, as allegories that speak to Tibetan (and Western sympathizers') concerns about the very nature of Tibetan culture-religion as it currently exists under Chinese rule. Most accounts that discuss the Panchen controversy in the USA, for example (as well as public discourse that I heard in Kathmandu), highlight the religious search for a legitimate candidate, how it has 'traditionally' been conducted (i.e. neither by PRC bureaucrats, nor subject to their approval), and how the actual events of 1995–1996 exemplify the struggle for Tibetan autonomy since 1959.

Gendhun Choekyi Nyima's recognition by the Dalai Lama proceeded based on information that the Chinese also had access to (as both were relying on senior lamas from the Panchen's home monastery),[18] and yet the Chinese government rejected the Dalai Lama's 'choice,' finding the 'authentic' 'soul boy,' by their own 'traditional' methods nearly a year later, in November 1995. These methods included the intervention of the Chinese state, and the use of a 'golden urn' from which the true candidate's name would be picked out from among the pretenders.

The crux of this concern for tradition in the search for the authentic tulku is, of course, the attempted expression of Tibet's 'traditional' (read historical) autonomy, and the subsequent Chinese counterclaim of its historical hegemony over Tibet. Is there not everywhere in national-cultural movements a reification of 'unique traditions'? Previously opaque, these traditions materialize after a search party for authentic cultural essences has been mobilized to find them. From the official hegemonic perspective, the Panchen tulku, as the figural Tibetan nation, can only be identified, enthroned and educated by the Chinese state to whom he is subordinate – indeed, only a child.

Gendhun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama, has been missing since shortly after his identification. His out-of-focus portrait (the only one available) has been displayed prominently at Tibetan pro-independence rallies in the United States, with the banner title: 'Where is this child?' In 1996, a Chinese official reversed the previous claims of ignorance as to the boy's whereabouts, claiming that the boy and his family were living in an unspecified location, as they had asked for protection from Tibetan militants.[19] The missing tulku seems to confirm Tibetan exiles' fears about the missing nation; the cultural heart of Tibet, its religion (a fragile child), has been spirited away and kept under Chinese surveillance. Just as there is anxiety and concern over the 'authenticity' of a particular tulku candidate, so is discourse surrounding Tibetan culture marked by concerns for its authenticity, both in exile and in Chinese-occupied Tibet, where many nationalists are sure it is being Sinicized to the point where it will be lost.[20]

* * *

While the recognition and succession of some emanations in Tibet and in the exile community have been highly politicized, what can be said of the tulkus that have now appeared, in Western bodies, in the USA? If the Karmapa and the missing Panchen Rinpoche are allegorical bodies of the Tibetan nation, as well as bodhisattvas who have chosen their contentious and difficult rebirths, what might Western tulkus signify in their manifestation, especially into a condition that seems marked by hybridity? As noted briefly above, the growth of Tibetan Buddhism in Europe, North America and Australia has produced a truly global – though still relatively small – religion that draws on the emphatically local traditions of one 'culture,' a culture that is now without a localized nation-state. Further, Tibetan Buddhism is being brought to the West (not to mention South

and Southeast Asia, and South America) largely by Tibetan tulkus and their attendant monks.

Several recent books have historicized the link between Western colonialism and Western interest in 'Buddhism' as an object of study, or as an object to be 'recovered' through academic practices (see especially Almond 1988; Lopez 1995; Tweed 1992). There have also been books written with a more general audience in mind, or perhaps an already Buddhist audience, such as Fields' *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (also, Tworkov's *Zen in America*). Significant in the narratives of Buddhism's arrival in the West are the doctrine's carriers, those persons who embodied the 'foreign' teaching for a new audience.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several Tibetan tulkus moved to the United States, establishing 'Dharma centers' like the Nyingma Meditation Center in Berkeley, CA (Tarthang Tulku's project) and Trungpa Rinpoche's Tail of the Tiger (later Karme Choling) in rural Vermont. More Tibetan masters – as well as their emissaries – came to the USA in the later 1970s and early 1980s; many of them were invited by small communities of Buddhist practitioners, some of whom had initially met their teachers during trips to India or Nepal. While a great many lamas pass through – including such senior Tibetan teachers as HH Dalai Lama, the previous Karmapa, the Sakya Trizin and the late Dudjom Rinpoche – there are also more teachers like the pioneering Trungpa and Tarthang tulkus who have recently chosen to settle in the West. The actual number of Buddhists in the USA is difficult to pinpoint; according to Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara, the executive chairman of the Los Angeles-centered American Buddhist Congress, the number is around four to five million, which includes Asian immigrants, descendants of Asian immigrants and American converts (*New York Times*, 26 October, 1988: A20).[21]

A very small number of these converts have become ordained monks and nuns, and a handful have even been recognized as tulkus by Tibetan lamas. According to Fields (1992 [1981]: 330), it was the Sixteenth Karmapa who recognized the first Western-born tulku, the son of Trungpa Rinpoche and his American wife, in 1974. Quietly, it seems, there were a few other American tulkus recognized by Tibetan masters, and in fact it seems likely that in the 1970s and early 1980s, American media were 'quiet' because Tibet had not yet been sufficiently domesticated as a sign of non-threatening and accessible spirituality. In 1986, a Spanish boy, Ösel Hita Torres was confirmed as the rebirth of Lama Thubten Yeshe, a Tibetan teacher who had established a tremendously successful international Buddhist organization. The recognition of Lama Ösel seems to have generated a great deal of interest in Europe, and the 'true life story' (*Reincarnation* by Vicki Mackenzie) of Lama Yeshe's life-work, death and subsequent rebirth as the child of Spanish disciples was very popular in Kathmandu in 1993–1994. Still, even with growing numbers of Western Buddhists, most tulkus are born into Tibetan bodies; the vast majority of tulkus are male, and most are recognized as children.[22] Most Tibetans themselves are quite matter of fact about the phenomenon. What to Western observers is inscrutable, purely spiritual, and fantastic, is often business as usual for many Tibetans in exile.

My outspoken friend Dekyi, a middle-aged Tibetan woman, asked me in 1994 why there had been so much Western interest in the recognition of the young Spaniard, Lama Ösel:

> Why do [Western] newspapers and movie people want to write about *this* tulku? If they really are interested in tulkus they should write more about the rebirth of Ling Rinpoche [former tutor to the Dalai Lama] – he is a very important lama and was also just discovered.

I tried to explain that the Spanish boy was rare: a *Western* tulku, and also that Lama Yeshe, the tulku's predecessor, had many Western students. She seemed unmoved; 'Western people don't understand.' What then do Western people seem to (mis)understand about tulkus? And why is there great interest in their emanations in the West? We turn to two recent cases that have commanded attention: Bernardo Bertolucci's fantasy *Little Buddha*, and the strangely parallel account of a Seattle boy's actual recognition as a Tibetan tulku.

Representing a little Buddha

Bertolucci's 1994 film, *Little Buddha*, was apparently conceived of as a story for children.[23] True enough, it is devoid of sex and violence, features a nine-year-old American actor as the central character (Jesse), and is often didactic in tone and content. It also attempts to convey rather abstruse material in simple terms, bypassing difficult concepts in favor of gorgeous representations and moody images. Yet the film is meant to be taken seriously; Bertolucci himself wrote an introduction for *Entering the Stream* (Bercholz and Kohn 1995), a diverse selection of essays by Buddhist masters past and present, and the top of the book's dust jacket tells us that it is 'a companion to the film *Little Buddha*.' To help authenticate the film's representations, both a Western Buddhist screenwriter (Rudy Wurlitzer) and a high-ranking Tibetan tulku (Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche) were recruited for the production process.[24] The film was much analyzed in the Western Buddhist journals *Tricycle* and *Shambhala Sun*, and there was agreement that it could become *the* representation of Buddhism to mainstream America, for promise or peril. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche was quoted as saying 'this film is better than a hundred monasteries because it will reach throughout the world' (*Tricycle*, Summer 1993: 28).[25]

Before the film properly begins, before the camera begins to tack back and forth between the past and the present, the East and the West, there is a metastatement that appears on the screen: 'Based on the true life stories of several children and their incredible adventures.' In other words, what follows may appear fantastic – it *is* fantastic – because it is based on real life. The very juxtaposition of an incredible (that is, unbelievable) adventure with real life seems to foreshadow the film's entire theme: one of Western dis-enchantment, and its subsequent re-enchantment via exotic others.

Lama Norbu, a Tibetan lama living in Bhutan, goes to Seattle to investigate a

boy that may be the incarnation of his deceased master. Upon meeting Jesse, and his rather bewildered parents, Lama Norbu presents the boy with a book, *Little Buddha* – the story of Prince Siddhartha. As the story is read to Jesse by various people in the course of the film – as the Asian past erupts into the Western present – we enter the film's parallel narrative: how Siddhartha Gautama was born, renounced his kingdom, searched for and attained enlightenment.[26] After initially fighting the irrationality of it all – that his child could be the rebirth of a Tibetan holy man – and in the wake of the bankruptcy and suicide of a close friend, Jesse's father gives in to Lama Norbu's entreaties to go with him to Bhutan for final verification of the boy's identity. That we are meant to read the West as cold and alienating is indicated not only by this subplot of bankruptcy, suicide, despair and meaninglessness, but by the cinematically enhanced blue-darkness of Seattle, its architectural modernity and cut-away scenes of cars streaming down the highway.

Thus, the overall color-tone of the scenes changes as we move from the West to the East, where a warm red-gold atmosphere prevails. The party first arrives in Nepal, where Lama Norbu checks on another candidate for his teacher's rebirth, a boy named Raju. Yet another candidate, Gita, also appears. Whereas Raju is a clownish Nepalese street performer, decidedly poor, Gita is a haughty Nepalese girl whose well-to-do family lives near the Indian border. At the monastery in Bhutan it is revealed that *all* of the children are emanations of Lama Dorje. As Lama Norbu explains, it is very rare, but has happened before, that three separate emanations of the lama's body, speech and mind appear. Finally, Jesse returns to a now naturally lit, re-enchanted Seattle, reunited with his family and home.

In 1993, as *Little Buddha* was completed, Sonam Wangdu was enthroned as the rebirth of the third Dezhung Rinpoche at his monastery, Tharlam, in Kathmandu. Dezhung Rinpoche IV, as the boy is known, was two years old at the time, born to a Tibetan father and an American Buddhist mother in Seattle. The previous Dezhung tulku, an eminent scholar-monk, spent many years in Seattle, teaching at the University of Washington to Westerners interested in Buddhism. The young tulku's mother, Carolyn Lama, and her late husband, Tendzin Chopal Lama, had dreams and other portents during her pregnancy that their own Tibetan teacher read as indications of the child's special status.

The national news printed stories about the boy in late 1995 and early 1996, as he left Seattle with his mother to take up residence in Tharlam in Nepal. In contrast with their previous visits to the monastery, Dezhung Rinpoche IV would this time remain behind, and his mother would return to Seattle leaving him in the care of his monk tutors. This had to be addressed in American news coverage: a four-year-old from Seattle being left in a monastery in Kathmandu, with only monks for companions? When Carolyn was interviewed on the Oprah Winfrey show in the mid-1990s, this seemed to particularly grip the audience: a little boy without his mother, and in such a far-off land? And American friends of mine wanted to know what I thought of this – had I seen it on the news? Would the boy's mother really leave him behind? Then there were the usual

confusions: that this boy was the 'next Dalai Lama' or that he 'didn't seem like a Buddha – you know, serene – when I saw him on TV.' Finally, one friend asked, 'can he really be a lama and be white?'

Unlike the politically and spiritually powerful Panchen and Karmapa tulkus mentioned earlier, Bertolucci's boy and the Fourth Dezhung Rinpoche were born and lived (at least initially) in exile. Crossing national borders and national bodies, they prove fascinating to Western audiences because they 'look' Western – or partially so – and have been raised within American 'culture.' But we are told that *in essence* they are *Tibetan* lamas within the form of young Americans. That is, they function semiotically as symbols, and are therefore not dependent on a relationship of contiguity to the Tibetan homeland or Tibetan substance in order to represent 'Tibet.' Unlike the Panchen and the Karmapa, these young Western tulkus are not physically tied to the national-cultural matrix of Tibet or to the agonizing condition of exile, but rather signify a Tibet that has been reduced to a floating spirituality capable of manifesting outside the narrative of nation.

By way of illustrating this point, consider another particularly interesting representation, also a 'children's story,' entitled *Where is Tibet?* (Gina Halpern 1991). While the story traces two Tibetan exile children's attempts to understand where their homeland is, and why it is 'special,' it ends with a robed monk – who looks exactly like the Dalai Lama – telling the children that 'Tibet is growing in your mind like a flower, like a jewel in the Lotus.' More troubling are the editorial notes on the back of the book, which tell us that '*Where is Tibet?* is really a way of asking "Where is happiness?".'

Both Bertolucci's film and news accounts of the young Dezhung tulku juxtapose the boys' apparent Western, secular, playful selves against their uncanny, 'wise beyond their years,' *true* selves. Hybridity may at first resist or confound essentialist inquiries, yet it also invites reification. The Eastern origin of these boys, how they are 'Other' than what they appear to be, is foregrounded in representational accounts because it provides the perfect pedigree of the exotic: otherworldly, fascinating, inscrutable, yet functioning according to a logic that only Tibetans – and the child himself in *Little Buddha* – can understand. At the same time, this Tibetan 'Other within' becomes approachable, even domesticated when understood as purely spiritual. The sign 'Tibet' always operates in this religious register, so that other aspects of Tibetan life and history, both in exile and under Chinese rule, become opaque. The result may be that Tibet is everywhere, and nowhere: a truly utopian place that serves to re-enchant the West via 'Tibetan' bodies.

Tibet was never colonized by European powers *per se*, but it was entered by British troops in 1904 after decades of desirous speculation.[27] We can trace this desire forward through time to current practices, in which Hollywood (and other popular media) call for Tibetan bodies to speak timeless truths. Yet before we end on this note of Orientalism and Western colonialism 'exposed,' I want to recall my discussions with a great many Tibetans in Nepal and Seattle, all of whom downplayed my skepticism towards Western media representations of

their lives. They spoke of a far more menacing colonizer, the PRC, and were keenly aware of their only weapon – world opinion – in their struggle. For these Tibetans, being visible is completely tactical, to be 'seized on the wing' (de Certeau 1984: xix) when the opportunity arises; its alternative is the loss of home, nation and visibility itself. And yet, as I suggest in this study, there are difficulties with publicity/visibility on any terms. Representations that work only in the religious register, privileging Tibet's spirituality, void of context and history, can subtly work to serve the West. While the agentive trajectory of emanation bodies is compelled by historic and cultural specificities, the Western representations examined here subtly or overtly sever such indexical links. The tulku's body is read as a symbol of alterity – yet an alterity that is de-localized and domesticated into an ultimately enlightening (sacralizing) presence. Tibet becomes not a place, but a space in the heart.

* * *

Emanation bodies have always pointed to something beyond themselves. Thoroughly semiotic beings, their appearances are heralded and then confirmed by signs; they are manifestations, symbolic embodiments, of something larger than themselves, the compassion and wisdom of the Buddhas. Tulkus are also the outgrowth or product of past habits of the body, speech and mind of their predecessors, and thus are the fruit of karma's seed. As literal continuations of their spiritually advanced 'selves,' they overstep the boundary of iconicity, the semiotic relationship that depends on similarity between the sign (or representamen) and the object signified. This is due to the fact that tulkus do not merely resemble their previous incarnation in terms of qualities, abilities and comportment. In fact, they may seem radically different from their predecessor in all of these aspects, as well as in physical appearance. But from the point of view of believers, and from the point of view of those high-ranking emanations who can recognize seemingly ordinary boys as tulkus, the *yang-srid* (the rebirth) *is* the predecessor.

Tulkus have always been authorized by religious discourses that mark them as spiritually other and superior, but they have also always taken (re)birth and been recognized within politicized terrain. As spiritual beings whose power could be transferred to political and economic arenas of Tibetan life, tulkus formed the very apex of Tibetan society; this continues to make the tulku status sought after (one Tibetan friend commented about emanations appearing like a lottery ticket in the midst of a family) and their veracity contested. However, with their appearance in far wider transnational landscapes there are new facets to the tulkus' significance.

Certain important emanations like the young Karmapa and the Panchen have come to represent the very essence of their homeland in Western media reports: on the one hand, captivity, fragility, innocence; on the other, endurance, escape, and spirituality. It is this captive spirituality, fragile in a child's body, which *iconically* reminds (through resemblance) both Tibetan and Euro-

Americans of the qualities of Tibetan 'culture,' the spiritual interior of the nation, and its endangered status. Yet I have also argued that much of their significance to both Westerners and Tibetans as embodiments of the nation depends upon their *indexical* relationship to Tibet. That is, the former presence of the Karmapa tulku in that place – or the absent tulku, in the case of the missing Panchen – allows them to embody the Tibetan nation in opposition to the occupying PRC in ways that other tulkus never could in exile. Indeed, there have been critics among some of my Kathmandu Tibetan friends who wonder if the Karmapa, whose mobility in India is now restricted due to Chinese pressure on Delhi, would not have better served his people if he had remained at home.

It is important then to recall that the vast majority of tulkus, like young Wangyal, live in their monasteries, perform their duties, undertake their studies (these days including English), and perhaps travel and teach foreigners when they are able. For most Tibetans, such tulkus are admired if they prove themselves as scholars or meditators. But they are a taken-for-granted part of the world, even if some people harbor their doubts about particular emanations, and others actively hope that their next child might be so favored. Almost without exception, my Tibetan interlocutors in Bodhanath – and many of the long-term Western Buddhists as well – were concerned only with specific tulkus they deemed particularly important, controversial or otherwise worth remarking on. By contrast, Western discourse about Tibet or Tibetan Buddhism is not initially concerned with specificities, but with the very figure of the tulku as a sign of Tibetan culture's radical alterity, spirituality and irrationality. According to my friend Dekyi, Westerners mis-construe what a tulku is, mis-take the title for the person. One reason this might be so is that for many in the West, both Buddhists and not, the tulku remains the primary sign of exotic Tibet and the esoteric, powerful mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism. There are no links to the nation – or rather, links to the nation only insofar as 'Tibet' signifies not a nation-place but a sacred-space to be visited, incorporated, attained.

Hence the fascination with tulkus born in the West. The situation resonates with the narrative devices and plot twists of changeling tales, frontier children captured and raised by Indians, even, most grandly, with the story of the Christ-child. The child, already emblematic of alterity (just out of reach like childhood itself), becomes even more alien with the discovery that he is not like his parents, not even, *really*, a child. What keeps the tulku from becoming a horrifying Other is the presence of the sign 'Tibet' within – which in turn conveys enlightenment, peace and ancient wisdom within its mystery.

If the Karmapa and Panchen emanations semiotically present nationalized bodies to a world audience, Bertolucci's child and the young Dezhung Rinpoche are examples of the tulku appearing in a different register. Still ostensibly marking 'Tibet,' for it is this sign which authorizes their essentially spiritual nature, these boys present a Tibet so delocalized and depoliticized as to be accessible to all. Perhaps more pointedly, they personify not only a Buddhist soteriology, in which tulkus emanate for the benefit of all suffering beings, but a

uniquely Orientalist soteriology as well, in which the ancient religious mysteries of the 'East' re-Orient the disenchanted West.

If this chapter has tracked the movements of the magical emanation body beyond Tibet, even as Tibet's aura is always in tow, chapter 3 considers the counterforce of late modernity, in which a far-distant locale becomes imbued with a magic not to be found at home. It begins therefore in Bodhanath, where pilgrims, tourists and celluloid heroes alike come to approach Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism – and perhaps take some of it home.

3 Commodities, identities and the aura of the Other

Under the gaze of the Chorten: Bodha and environs

This chapter has several aims. We begin with an entry into Bodhanath by way of its central point: the Chorten or Stupa and the circular plaza that surrounds it. Second, I explore the ramifications of vision, and the preconceptions behind our views of self and other, in the encounters between Tibetans and Western travelers in Bodhanath. How are social identities – 'tourist' and 'pilgrim' and even 'refugee' – partially constructed by the very act of gazing? Further, I consider the role of objects in the marketplace as carriers of meaning, as social signs, in a landscape that is continually marked by reference to culture, the 'foreign,' and the transcendentally spiritual.

When visitors to Kathmandu's international airport disembark onto the tarmac, the Chorten of Bodhanath – a great whitewashed dome topped by a golden spire – is visible in the near distance. Its 40-meter height easily dominates the surrounding horizon, yet is itself dwarfed by the mountains that ring the Kathmandu Valley and, as of 1999, by the gigantic Hyatt Regency Hotel built near this World Heritage Site. To first-time visitors newly arrived, the Chorten is immediately strange, and hence expected; later in the guidebooks they can read about its location at the northeast edge of the city and the 'Tibetan market' that surrounds its base. (see fig 3) They can learn the reason for its mountain-like shape, how its huge square base (circled by a wall set with prayer wheels) represents the element of earth, and how the great white brick dome that sits upon this is not a hollow temple space but more likely a reliquary. Finally there may be a close-up photo of the mysterious eyes that decorate the four-sided turret (Skt. harmika) out of which its cylindrical spire rises. Indeed, one of the best guidebooks for those tourists interested in local history, politics, religion and, of course, the sights to see, remarks on those eyes:

> The addition of eyes to the square harmika is a stroke of genius unique to Nepali stupas [chorten]. They are said to represent the eyes of the primordial Adi Buddha, or the guardians of the four directions; or perhaps they

> symbolize the omniscience of enlightenment. Whichever, they add an uncanny presence to the stupa, endowing it with a curious intelligence.
>
> (Moran 1991: 196)

The function of any tour book is to explain the unfamiliar, to feed the desire among a great many travelers to make the Other familiar, to domesticate alterity. The city scape of Kathmandu is overdetermined with 'meanings,' especially when it comes to the reading of religious monuments, which – like esoteric Hindu and Buddhist texts – are meant to be interpreted on a multiplicity of levels. Tucci (1980: 104; 1988 [1932]) has written of the form of the chorten (Skt. stupa) as a type of mandala (which he terms a pyscho-cosmogram of the Buddhist universe), a structure whose every aspect – in this case from the vast square base and inverted bowl that surmounts it, to the harmika and terraced spire, and finally the parasol-like canopy that completes it – corresponds to phenomena of the outer and inner worlds, the profane and the sacred. But in the quotation above, Moran (no relation) speaks to the overdetermined aspects in her very description; she tries to tie several significations to the signifying eyes, but ultimately doesn't force the issue with closure. For whatever may be the case, the Bodhanath Chorten figures as something exceedingly 'other' indeed: a sentient monument. And while I never heard such an interpretation while I was staying in Kathmandu, Yael Bentor writes that:

> stupas and images are considered to be types of emanation bodies, that is to say various *yi-dam*s [Tantric tutelary deities] appear in the world as stupas and images for the sake of sentient beings. According to the Tibetan tradition, those endowed with higher realization are capable of seeing these stupas and images in their exalted state – as *yidam*s themselves.
>
> (1996: 6)

The chorten's form and function as a Buddhist reliquary mound had its ostensible Buddhist beginnings with the Teacher himself, Shakyamuni, who instructed his disciple Ananda to build a stupa as a site for His mortal remains (as mentioned in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Walshe 1987: 264). In later times, and with the coming of Buddhism to Tibet, the importance of the reliquary function diminished; some chorten retain this aspect, but all chorten can be seen as iconic representations of the Body of the Buddha, and as symbolic representations of the universe itself (for a discussion of these symbolic aspects, only alluded to here, see Bentor 1996; Tucci 1988 [1932]). *Bya-rung kha-shor* (pronounced Jarungkhashor), as the Chorten of Bodhanath is known by Tibetans, combines both reliquary and symbolic aspects, and also serves as a mnemonic for the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the seventh century.

According to an account in the revelatory literature (*gter-ma*) of Tibetan Buddhism, the Great Chorten was built in the distant past by a pious poultry woman and her four (or in some versions, three) sons. The clever woman received permission and a land grant to build this immense monument after she

tricked the king into promising as much land as could be covered by an elephant's hide. The poultry woman cut the hide in an ingenious way, and then used it to mark the perimeter of a vast circle; when local people complained to their lord, largely out of jealousy, the king stood by the decree he had issued (hence the Chorten's Tibetan name: *bya-rung kha-shor*, 'permission to do what is suitable [based on a] slip of the tongue'). The poultry woman did not live to see the completion of the Chorten, though she attained a rebirth in the god realm due to her excellent faith. Her four sons vowed upon finishing the construction that they would take rebirth together in the northern land of barbarians, Tibet, and would tame the land and its people by introducing the holy Dharma there (Dowman 1978 [1973]; Ehrhard 1991; Wylie 1970).

Tibetans in the Kathmandu Valley frequently cite this account, and also remark that the Chorten is filled with the relics of departed, spiritually realized beings, most significantly the Buddha of the previous age, 'Od-srung (Skt. Mahakashyapa). Relics are the ostensible reason why the Chorten was described to me as a receptacle of blessings by one devout Tibetan man, and why a woman shopkeeper, whose goods were spread out by the side of the Chorten's walkway each day, responded to my inquiries about her health saying, 'I am healthy and all is well due to the blessings of the precious Chorten.' The eyes of the Chorten look out over the shops, houses and monasteries of Bodhanath, and the people in the community. It is the source of a very real, though insubstantial, sort of 'energy' that the faithful may receive, as the above comments index. But it also generates *material* substances imbued with this same energy-essence, as when it apparently issues forth blessed water or soil, causing Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhists to stand in line for hours to gather up some of this precious material. Like eyes, or like gateways – both Watcher and Watched – the Chorten issues forth blessings from within itself, and receives back the stares, reflections and offerings of those who gaze upon it.

For Buddhists, the proper way to honor the Chorten and all that it represents is by making real or imagined offerings to it , and particularly by circumambulating it (*skor-ba brgyab-pa*; often referred to as 'doing kora' by Western Buddhists) in a clockwise fashion while reciting prayers or mantra (*sngags*). Such practices, which are specifically enjoined in order to utilize the body, speech and mind of a devotee, produce a 'Buddhist' in relation to the Chorten or other object of veneration. The logic of these practices will be addressed in later chapters, yet it is important to note here the centrality of the Chorten, both spatially and symbolically, in the life of Bodhanath. It is a still center that draws Tibetan exiles, pilgrims and tourists alike into its orbit.

Within the last thirty years the area around the Chorten has gone from a small Tamang and Newar agricultural community, surrounded by agricultural fields, to a seemingly Tibetan boomtown. In the early 1960s, Tibetans fleeing the Chinese occupation did not initially settle in Bodhanath, but in other areas of Kathmandu, and Nepal.[1] By the mid-1970s more Tibetans were moving out to Bodhanath, and several new monasteries were built in the rice fields that lay beyond the two-story houses that ringed the Chorten's main plaza. In fact only

two lha-khang ('shrines' or 'temples') predate the arrival of the refugees. One was built by the so-called Chini Lama, the chief lama of Bodhanath's Tamang population, and the custodian of the Bodhanath shrine itself. The second was begun by a Mongolian lama who arrived in the late 1950s. This eventually became the monastery of Samtenling (*bsam-gtan-gling*), now associated with the Tibetan government-in-exile.

Bodhanath was still a very small community, with Tibetan families renting or in some cases buying land from Newar and Tamang owners and putting up their own poured-concrete and brick dwellings.[2] The following ten years – from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s – were the beginning of rapid growth, with not only many Tibetan families, but more monasteries and some carpet factories being added to the local landscape. Bodhanath began to attract more Western expatriates interested in Tibetan Buddhism. This, together with an influx of Tibetans who had made their fortunes in the carpet industry or the sale of antiques, caused the house-building industry to skyrocket in the fields surrounding the Chorten. Bodhanath has become a seeming 'Tibetan' village with an economy sustained by international transactions and translocations. 'Seeming' because there are Tamang, Newar and even Hindu Bahun-Chhetri families that live – or work – in the area. Their relative invisibility *vis-à-vis* Tibetans, especially among Westerners travelers, is due to the extent of Tibetan settlement in Bodhanath, but also to the allure of the signifier 'Tibet.'

Tourists, pilgrims and others

Bodhanath's Chorten, like so many other pilgrim sites in the world, has become a tourist attraction. Thousands of tourists arrive each year from central Kathmandu by chartered buses, taxis and bicycles to see not only the immense Chorten itself, but the 'Tibetan village' that sits around it. When they arrive they see Tibetan shops and monasteries, and Tibetan people praying or even prostrating themselves as they circumambulate the Great Chorten. But perhaps there is also a jolt, a moment of confusion, when the day-tourist sees that there are also a few Western people – just like himself, or are they? – muttering prayers, circumambulating and prostrating before this monument. The sense of shared identity, indexed by a quick double-take, doesn't last long but makes for an interesting tableau: the Western tourist momentarily identifying with the fellow foreigner; the Western Buddhist, caught up in prayer, identifying with the Tibetan; and the Tibetan shopkeeper asking the anthropologist to tell the tourist about the Chorten's symbolism, 'you tell them – they won't understand me.'

MacCannell has argued that advanced capitalism and the structures of modernity have troubled the category of pilgrim and pilgrimage in the West:

> Moderns somehow know what the important attractions are, even in remote places. This miracle of consensus that transcends national boundaries rests on an elaborate set of institutional mechanisms, a twofold process of *sight sacralization* that is met with a corresponding *ritual attitude* on the part of

> tourists … Modern international sightseeing possesses its own moral structure, a collective sense that certain sights must be seen … Throughout the world, churches, cathedrals, mosques, and temples are being converted from religious to touristic functions.
>
> (MacCannell 1989 [1976]: 42–43)

The tourist, a quintessentially modern individual, has become our pilgrim *par excellence*, taking part in sightseeing *as ritual*, attending to tourist 'attractions' that *must* be seen (MacCannell 1989 [1976]; see also Graburn 1977: 19–20). Where does this leave our Western Buddhist pilgrim? If tourists are pilgrims, have pilgrims become tourists? This chapter traces the relationship of commodified 'cultured' objects to cultural outsiders who come to Bodhanath in search of 'culture.'

* * *

In the spring of 1994, I sat with a Tibetan woman off to the side of the wide circular plaza that surrounds the huge Buddhist monument. My friend Tsering, a 40-year-old woman with several children, had set up her table of goods for the day, hoping to sell some of her Tibetan curios and jewelry (all made in India and Nepal) to the tourists that came to see the Chorten. As we talked she moved the prayer beads (*'phreng-ba*) she held in her left hand, her lips moving to the mantra she recited.

Tsering and I were talking about the many Western people coming to study Buddhism with Tibetan lamas in Bodhanath – but we also discussed Christianity, and how her business was going. I looked up at a pause in our discussion: a tour bus that made daily excursions from Kathmandu's premier hotel and shopping district had arrived with its cargo. The tour group that had been let off at the gate to the Chorten's circular plaza began to disperse around the monument, with a couple of tourists heading our way.

A French man in his mid-forties fingered a few of the prayer bead strands that Tsering had placed out front; he feigned disinterest, scanning the rest of the table's offerings as his compatriots moved on to another shop. Tsering said 'Hello' and flashed a smile, he responded with 'How much?,' holding one of the *'phreng-ba* aloft. 'One thousand two hundred rupees[3] for that – it's got many turquoise in it, see?' she said, pointing out the flaked turquoise that had been crushed and embedded in some of the beads. 'Oh too much, too much! I will pay five hundred.' Tsering remained impassive, but I could discern her annoyance: 'No, five hundred is not possible, one thousand two hundred is a good price.' Now the man seemed angry, sure he was being taken advantage of. He straightened up, preparing to walk away. Tsering made no move to call after him.

He only got a few paces and turned back. 'How much is that one – that one, yes,' he said, pointing to the *'phreng-ba* she had continued to pray on even while conducting business. Tsering's face registered momentary confusion, then it

clouded over, even as she tried to smile: 'This one is not for sale … This one is mine.' 'But I will pay a very good price – that one is nice … very old, yes? How much?' 'Not for sale I said!' Tsering's fingers had stopped moving over the beads and her face was flushed. The man muttered something and walked away. Tsering turned to me, 'Why do they think *everything* is for sale?' and then added, in Tibetan, as if remembering that I was perhaps not just another tourist, 'This business is too hard. But what can I do?'

It is precisely this sort of 'tourist behavior' – disrespectful, uncomprehending, materialistic, and shallow – that some Western Buddhists pointed out to me as a contrast to their own positions in Bodhanath, their certainty that '*I* am not a tourist.' Such comments reflect MacCannell's (1989 [1976]: 106–107) observations that no one wants to self-identify as a 'tourist,' especially those who might, at first glance, be taken for one.

> The touristic critique of tourism is based on a desire to go beyond the other 'mere' tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture … All tourists desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel.
>
> (MacCannell 1989 [1976]: 10)

Many Western Buddhists' sense of themselves *as Buddhists* is buoyed by their inversion of the qualities they assign to tourists; as Buddhists they have come to Bodhanath not to gape, but to gaze in appreciation. A great deal of recent scholarship, especially in feminist and film theory, has of course been concerned with the notion of the 'gaze.' Such perspectives have encouraged us to examine the role of vision and the act of spectatorship in the formation of subjectivities, which might best be characterized as historically particular and powerfully contingent 'selves' or 'identities' that are seemingly dominated by – or reside within – a singular 'I.' Bracketing the question of a unitary, stable self, whether called a 'subject' or 'ego' in Euro-American discourse (not to mention the extensively intricate Tibetan Buddhist literature concerned with this topic), how might the act of seeing and its concomitant emotional/discriminatory states be theorized in the arena of tourism – or pilgrimage?[4] While what I call the 'gape' registers only difference between the perceiver and perceived, and leaves this difference intact, the appreciative gaze is fueled by a desire to draw closer, perhaps to possess. The visual act is directed outward, but its effects move inward, where the sheer alterity of an Other creates a space for the self's own recognition.

The appreciative – some might venture, colonizing – gaze on the part of Western Buddhist travelers epitomizes an interest in and engagement with Tibetan culture that usually goes far beyond a tourist's surface attention to the local people. But for many Western Buddhists this fascination is very specific; they seek to understand and perhaps even emulate aspects of Tibetan 'culture' as they have imagined it to be, so that Tibetan culture's perceived essence – Buddhism – can be more readily grasped and finally, internalized. In trying to

chase down the magic of mimesis, the process by which one seeks to embody that Other's power, Michael Taussig asks: 'What does such a compulsion to become Other imply for the sense of Self? Is it conceivable that a person could break boundaries like this, slipping into Otherness, trying it on for size? What sort of world would this be?' (1993: 33).

A world, perhaps, of Others reflected in reflexive Selves? As religious converts and cultural outsiders, Western Buddhists tend to be highly self-aware, nearly hyper-conscious, when it comes to their 'new' religious identity. The 'trajectory of the self' in late modernity is always internally narrated and highly reflexive (Giddens 1991), but my argument here is that encountering difference in Bodhanath, and the move to become a Buddhist, further intensifies this practice. The tension between a desire to become 'like Tibetans' and a self-conscious concern with their 'modern' Western identities is prominent in many discussions in Buddhist magazines and e-mail chat groups in the USA, and also in conversations among Western Buddhists around Bodhanath.[5] Notions of tradition, authenticity and national/cultural essences are all invoked, as well as revoked, as Western converts to Buddhism come to terms with what it means to be both 'Buddhist' and 'Western.' 'The West' is a frequent target of criticism, a site of moral decay, where materialism, environmental degradation and shallow values hold sway, especially in the minds of those who make the journey to Bodhanath in search of an alternative. At the same time, some Western Buddhists committed to humanist and feminist principles find Buddhism as encountered in Asia hidebound by tradition. Semi-public critical inquiries along these lines were aired during the first Western Buddhist teacher's conference, held in March 1993 in Dharamsala, India, with HH Dalai Lama in attendance (much discussed by Western Buddhists in Bodhanath at the time). In recent years, there has been a proliferation of books and articles in both academic and popular American presses that further explore this territory (e.g., Boucher 1993; Gross 1993; Klein 1995). All such discourse, in short, is questioning, while at the same time producing, something called 'Western Buddhism.'

For Westerners who have come from their home countries to order to study or learn the Dharma, being a Buddhist *and* a Westerner is not just an identity, but a way of being in the world that is clearly different from a tourist. Several Western Buddhists who came to Bodhanath to study with Tibetan lamas, to attend meditation retreats at local Tibetan monasteries and to visit sacred sites, remarked to me that they were not like tourists, though as travelers they might be superficially like them. Rather, they argued, we are *pilgrims*, and the Chorten here in Bodhanath is our destination.

I pondered this response. Just how superficial is the resemblance between tourist and pilgrims? After all, both tourists and Western pilgrims arrive in Bodhanath with desirous expectations – both idiosyncratic as well as ordered by historically situated narratives and representational regimes – that create 'Tibet' as an object of the Western gaze.[6] Isn't the very mobility of both groups enabled by similar, if not identical, economic processes? What was I to make of the French tourist who wanted to buy Tsering's Buddhist prayer beads? While I

appreciate the degree of emotional rapport that some Western Buddhist travelers do establish – or sincerely wish to establish – with Bodhanath Tibetans, the search for something called *authentic* 'Tibetan culture' is another common thread that links together not only Western tourists and Western Buddhists, but even local Tibetans.

* * *

As mentioned earlier, identity categories can reify or render invisible the many internal distinctions within groups. From a pragmatic and everyday viewpoint, such labels are useful and indeed were necessarily employed by the people of Bodhanath that I worked with. Western Buddhists, tourists and Tibetans are all heterogeneous groups whose internal divisions are important, but complex. It is neither possible nor my concern to produce a detailed typology of such identities – as if a list could contain their internal differences – but a few remarks about 'Western Buddhists' must be made. The 'West' itself is hardly an unproblematic category (Clifford 1988: 272–273; Hallisey 1995: 32–33) yet like 'Tibet'[7] or 'Tibetan,' and to a lesser degree 'Buddhism' (and 'Buddhist'), it was frequently treated as such in my discussions with North American, European and New Zealander-Australian travelers, as well as with Tibetans themselves ('Inji,' *dbyin-ji*, a term originally associated with the English, is now used more widely for white Westerners).[8] That is to say, 'the West,' 'Tibet' and 'Buddhist' were most often invoked not only as generalized features but as essential fixtures of identity, always, if implicitly, in contradistinction to an Other.

At one level, 'Western Buddhists' in Bodhanath can all be differentiated by their residence and mobility patterns. The expatriate (Nepal-resident) Buddhists, some of whom have been living in the Kathmandu Valley for two decades or more, clearly perceive themselves as different from those Western Buddhists who have come to Bodhanath (for a few weeks or a few months) in order to meet teachers and receive instruction. While expatriates stay, the traveler Buddhists come and go; unless they return to Bodhanath with some frequency, as quite a number do, they will remain largely anonymous and undifferentiated to the long-term Western Buddhist residents of the Kathmandu Valley.

Expatriate Buddhists, a few of whom have considerable mastery of both written and spoken Tibetan, and indeed who sometimes seemed to me as kindred anthropologists, figure more prominently in following chapters. Here the focus is on those Western Buddhists who are short-term residents of Bodhanath, those whose similarity to tourists is most pronounced; unless otherwise noted, they are the group marked by – and who self-identify as – 'Western Buddhist.' In what follows, I examine the formation of two Western subjectivities, 'Buddhist' and 'tourist', both marked by mobility (i.e. both travelers). In this discussion I use 'traveler' to refer to both Western Buddhists and tourists; in Kathmandu I met a few 'tourists' who self-identified as 'travelers' rather than risk association with the tourist identity-category (regarding the almost moral privileging of 'travelers' over 'tourists', see MacCannell 1989 [1976]: 103–104).

In this analysis, numbers do indeed present a problem, both due to definition difficulties (when does a Western Buddhist in Bodhanath become an 'expat'? When does an 'expat' with Buddhist interests become a 'Buddhist'?) and because even the expatriate community is far from stable. I give rough estimates of approximately 100–150 Western Buddhist residents of Kathmandu (about half residing in Bodhanath) in 1993–1994, with the number of Western Buddhist travelers in Bodhanath fluctuating wildly during the same period, from just a few dozen or so (during monsoon) to five hundred or more (at the times when important retreats/seminars or empowerments were occurring).

Away from home: mobility and culture's place

The apprehension of one's own 'culture' – let alone the culture of the Other – is itself a product of modern desires to locate a stable 'home' within the nation-state, a pure authentic essence that cannot be articulated without a keen sense of it already being gone, or just on the verge of being lost (Ivy 1995: 29–59).[9] For Tibetans-in-exile, however, the (un)recoverable home is not just distant in time, but rather, distant in space; it is just over the snow mountains to the north. Tibet is a site that awaits recovery, the nation waiting to be reclaimed. Until that time, Tibetan culture is absent from its origin-place; as the Dharamsala government reminds its people, the nation is carried *as culture* (and almost always this signifies Buddhism) within the very bodies and minds of those in exile. It is telling that some Tibetans strongly identified with the Jewish struggle for the homeland-nation of Israel (see Nowak 1984). The brute fact of their diaspora creates a context in which cultural identity can become a precious cargo, kept in safe-keeping for upcoming generations, until such time as home can be regained and culture can once more find its ground.

The temporal dimension of cultural loss and absence is secondary in this discourse, perhaps with good reason. For if the authentic essence of the Tibetan nation lies not only over the Himalaya, but in the pre-modern period before Chinese colonization, how then to recoup what is already past? Perhaps by recognizing that it is *not* gone, not yet. Indeed, I found many Tibetans in Bodhanath and Dharamsala emphatic about the fact that 'time is going, and our culture is disappearing in Tibet' whenever talk turned to Chinese-occupied Tibet; the expected disappearance is still in the future. As HH Dalai Lama has said repeatedly in criticizing the Chinese emigration to his country (which the PRC government heartily denies is occurring), if nothing is done soon, it will be too late. In fact, whether government policy or not, it is likely that Tibetans will come to be a minority in their own land, and there will be no way to reverse the situation. Lost, and unrecoverable.

Bear in mind the workings of desire and imagination – set within the context of late capitalism, the instability of nation(s) and practiced consumerism – that link Western tourists and pilgrims, as well as Bodhanath Tibetans: all are displaced people, all are searching for 'home' having left 'home' behind. For Western tourists and pilgrims Bodhanath is, at least initially, the antithesis of

home. As an outpost of Tibetan culture, with a huge inscrutable Buddhist monument surrounded by monasteries and a refugee population, it is other-worldly. Yet the very act of travel and the sheer alterity of what one encounters 'over there' produce that notion of home all the more strongly. For many Western Buddhist pilgrims, staying in Bodhanath and praying in the shadow of the Chorten reveal the deep, essential self that was alienated at home; Bodhanath becomes the site of a 'true' home-coming, whereas the national-home becomes a shadowy, negative figure. As mentioned in the following chapter, Bodhanath is 'authentic' Tibet for many travelers because there Tibetan culture is on display as a living tradition, especially in its monumentalized cultural forms (i.e. monasteries). Tibetan people are free to express their essential religiosity, something that is deemed impossible in Chinese-occupied Tibet, and indeed Western tourists and Buddhist pilgrims expect it of them. The essential aspect of Tibetan culture, its Buddhism, is the place that search-weary Western pilgrims seek to enter, a place that they understand as a more authentic 'home', a more authentic self (recall the 'punch line' of the children's story mentioned in the preceding chapter: Tibet is in your heart).

Tourists, both as individuals and as part of 'guided' tour groups, also come to observe this Buddhism on display in the monasteries near the Chorten. Around Bodhanath, it is Buddhism, and more precisely monastic Buddhism, that stands out while *standing in* for Tibetan 'culture.' In writing *So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas*, *New York Times* correspondent Barbara Crossette visited Bodhanath (Bodha) and described her impressions:

> On a dismal afternoon, when a Kathmandu spring had reverted without warning to wintry drizzle and dull gray skies, I went for a long walk up the hill behind the massive white stupa at Bodhnath, where one splendorous new monastery after another has risen to serve exiled Tibetans and all others seeking to study Buddhism since the Chinese began their assaults on religious life in Lhasa and other holy places. I was looking for Shechen, the temple and meditation center established by this century's most revered and beloved Bhutanese [*sic*] lama, the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. These few square miles above what everyone calls 'Bodha' are becoming the world capital of Tibetan Buddhism, a place to start or finish or break a journey of discovery in the Himalayan kingdoms
>
> (Crossette 1995: 45)[10]

A 'journey of discovery' is exactly what most travelers have in mind, though what exactly is to be 'found' in Nepal seems to oscillate between an internal site and an external space become place. At the back of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (Winter 1997: 125), I found a small notice for 'Snow Lion,' a tour company named after the mythical beast associated with Tibet. 'TIBET-NEPAL-BHUTAN, Everest, Ladakh, Hunza, K2, Sikkim, Garwhal, and More. Walk in small groups to unaffected places hidden in the world's highest mountains. Live in pure culture.' The reader is confronted with a string of place names: countries, mountains and

mountain regions where culture is still 'pure,' places still 'unaffected' (by the taint of Western contact?) and awaiting the traveler's gaze. But in a previous page's notice, it seems that the *real* journey commences only when the proximal destination has been reached. The quarter-page advertisement for 'Guided Journeys, Inc.,' based in Denver, Colorado, begins with the message:

Embark on a journey to the center of yourself.

> We specialize in travel to India, Nepal and Tibet. Create your own itinerary or journey on a preset tour. In order to support the local community all trips are led by local guides and five percent of all proceeds are donated to organizations that support and preserve the culture and environment of Tibetan, Nepali, and Indian Peoples.
>
> (*Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Winter 1997: 106)

'Guided Journeys, Inc.' may privilege the position of the local guide for eco-political reasons, but several Western Buddhist friends remarked to me, with some consternation, that companies in Kathmandu often have *Nepalese* guides with little background in Tibetan Buddhism, who take their groups to see not only Bodhanath, but Pashupatinath (Nepal's 'holiest Hindu temple') and more, all in one day. Their concern seemed to be that Western tourists might not hear the 'truth' about the significance of the Chorten (or Tibetan Buddhism itself) from non-Buddhist guides, or that Bodhanath and its monasteries would become just *another* tourist attraction when they merited much closer attention. Clearly, the representation of Tibetan Buddhism was something that my friends felt they had a stake in.

Some tour companies, especially those based in the USA or Europe, are aware of this and market their treks/tours/pilgrimages to an already Buddhist audience. Their guides might be academic Buddhologists, or perhaps practicing Buddhists themselves (Nepalese, Tibetan or Euro-American), leading Western Buddhist pilgrims around the Chorten and into some of the monasteries of Bodhanath. There were also several Tibetan lamas, now based in the USA and in Europe, who brought their students with them 'on pilgrimage' to the most important Buddhist sites in India and Nepal during 1993 and 1994. Likewise, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, an international organization of Buddhists based at Kopan monastery, just a short distance from the Bodhanath Chorten, began a business that I became aware of in the late 1990s after I found a link for it on their website (http://www.fpmt.org):

> Pilgrim's Progress is a Kathmandu-based tour operator specialising in *Buddhist pilgrimage tours*. We are a team of western, Tibetan and Nepalese Buddhists offering a service for pilgrimage groups and cultural tours. We live

> in Nepal … We know Nepal … and India … and Tibet. We have qualified Buddhist guides who know the pilgrimage sites.
>
> (Emphasis and ellipses in original)

When Western Buddhists 'tour' there is slippage between tourist and pilgrim categories, for both seek the authentic sights that one 'really has to see.' A sense of obligation is common among all tourists and pilgrims; guidebooks, tour leaders and those who have gone before all impress this upon the tourist-pilgrim. And even though travelers in South Asia valorize 'independents' against the 'group-tour' types, there are very few individual travelers who go anywhere 'on their own' without at least one much-consulted guide book. As MacCannell indicates, any notion of an 'unguided' or 'independent' tourist is erroneous. A book, just as a flesh-and-blood guide, tells one 'what must be seen' and *how* to see it. Travelers are thus always embedded in discourses or structures that make tourism a meaningful, rule-bound and powerfully productive activity (MacCannell 1989 [1976]). This is historically the case in the pilgrim's guide genre of Tibetan literature (see Ferrari 1958; Newman 1996; Wylie 1962; 1965) as well as in contemporary tourist guides (MacCannell 1989 [1976]: 57–76). Tibetan guide books were aimed at the literate pilgrim, but were also no doubt read by monks and lamas who never traveled to the places described in their texts. Either way, the itineraries and descriptions of the sacred objects one may expect to find at a given site circumscribe the world through Buddhist discourse, interpreting the natural world as if it were a text itself. Particular sites are often marked as significant by being incorporated into quasi-historical accounts, so that there is an indelible link between the narrative and the place that indexes it. In the case of the Jarungkhashor Chorten of Bodhanath, the site itself invokes the narrative of its building, the beings involved in this meritorious effort, and the future effects of this activity. That is, the spiritual merit (*bsod-nams*) was such that the three (or four) half-brothers involved in the Chorten's construction took rebirth as some of the most important figures in the historical transmission of Buddhism to Tibet.[11]

Tour books in the West provide similar linkages, overlaying space with the narrative that creates it as a place in history. And though it might be argued that contemporary tour books avoid the sacralization so prominent in Tibetan guide books (even in light of MacCannell's proposition that tourism has become sacred practice for us moderns), we might ask what Western tour books make of a place like Tibet, a place that seems (preter)naturally spiritual. Moon Publications, based in California, is rapidly expanding its line of tourist guide books aimed especially at those tourists who want an 'intimate understanding of a region, from its culture and history to essential practicalities.'[12] Their massive guide to Tibet, well over a thousand pages, is subtitled 'A Pilgrim's Guide' – the only one of their handbooks to be so styled.

* * *

For Tibetan exiles, culture becomes the 'home' that travels. The Dharamsala government (of Tibet-in-exile) presents a 'Tibetan culture' to be remembered, reproduced and emulated by Tibetan refugees, and Buddhism is central to this cultural identity.[13] As the Fourteenth Dalai Lama notes in his introduction to the Year of Tibet issue of *Chö-Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture*:

> For more than a thousand years Tibetans have been custodians of the full range of the Buddha's teachings. These have been analysed, refined, and most important of all put into practice, becoming the mainstay of Tibetan culture. We have had a responsibility to preserve our living culture, not just to our brothers and sisters who remain in Tibet, but also to the world at large. If it were to be lost, the world's culture would be that much poorer.
>
> (Dalai Lama 1991: 15)

Here, Buddhism is not just for Tibetans. Indeed, a great many Bodhanath exiles told me, 'It is for everyone; it doesn't matter where you are from, because it can benefit every being.' Tibetans are also very aware of the importance of being *visible* to the world community in their struggle to regain their homeland. Indeed, *Chö-Yang* ('Melody of Dharma') is itself a publication that is produced in Dharamsala, in English, for a largely Western readership. The strategic Tibetan desire to be seen encounters a Western gaze informed by a discourse that exoticizes Tibetans, and reifies Tibetan culture, even, ironically, as it 'celebrates' Tibet. Both Western and Tibetan statements, such as the one by the Dalai Lama above, very nearly conflate 'culture' and 'religion' (Buddhism) in the Tibetan context; these terms often come to be collapsed and are then located, as an essence, within the very bodies of Tibetan people themselves.

The reduction of Tibetan 'culture' to 'Buddhism,' and the concomitant essentializing character of such a move is deeply problematic on several different levels. For one, it is an excellent example of the way in which the empirical diversity of indeterminate social life is generalized, synchronized and fixed under a conceptual category, i.e. 'culture' or 'religion,' that is itself then reified into a static 'entity' that appears to exist a priori in the world. Second, in the specificities of Tibet as an object of Western knowledge, there is a pervasive Orientalism that ascribes particular privilege to tropes of atemporality, the mysterious and uncanny, in describing the finally unknowable Tibetan. Tibetan 'culture' is perceived as the Occident's essence inverted, priorities of progress and materiality having been radically rejected. I do not mean to deny the import of religious practice and faith in the lives of many Tibetans. However, it seems that too often this 'religiosity' as imagined by Western tourists, Buddhists and even scholars is not only defined in Western terms of piety or otherworldliness, but is also a type of penumbra such that all other facets of Tibetan life are cloaked in its shadow.

Yet Western interest in Buddhism was viewed by many of my Tibetan friends, laity and clergy alike, as extremely positive. Most discussed this in terms of the benefits that knowledge of the Dharma brings to any and all people, but others

emphatically saw it as a validation of their cultural identity, taking pride in the fact that 'Western doctors and business people – important people – come from so far away to study with our lamas.' A few younger Tibetan friends expressed their frustration, however; they resented being viewed as 'holy' or as pious caricatures. Their ambivalence toward both Western Buddhists and tourists was apparent in their wish to not only be seen, but heard as well. Palmo, in her late twenties, found that her attempts to become financially independent were brushed aside by Western Buddhist friends: 'It was as if they wouldn't take my interests in business or education seriously because I am just a Tibetan, and what do Tibetans know, other than about Dharma?'

As exiles who feel that their culture and very identity as Tibetans under siege in their homeland, the replication of Tibetan 'tradition' in diaspora is a self-conscious and strategic undertaking explicitly supported by the Tibetan government-in-exile. In Bodhanath, with the Western tourist/Western Buddhist interest in viewing and experiencing 'Tibetan culture,' monasteries and shops are sites where this culture becomes proffered as commodities. These commodities are both objects (in the curio shops) and experiences (in the monasteries), but they are not a conscious Tibetan self-representation for the benefit of Westerners. Rather, these cultural representations arise through the concatenation of Western and Tibetan desires. And these in turn exist within the specific context of the Tibetan diaspora and the larger field of late capitalism, both of which are marked by the transnational flow of goods, ideologies, capital and persons.[14]

As Walter Benjamin noted, authenticity is only identifiable *after its loss* under the commodity regime, through which it emerges as yet another quality that is commodifiable (Benjamin 1969 [1936]). Returning to the incident discussed above: Tsering's prayer beads threatened to become a commodity among other commodities through her unwitting presentation of them alongside similar items that were for sale, together with the French tourist's desire to buy the most authentic *'phreng-ba*, i.e. one not produced for tourists. Tsering's own *'phreng-ba* was able to appear most authentic because it was not tainted by being a commodity for sale; her beads were actually used, for their actual purpose, by an actual Tibetan. Yet the very desire to possess such an 'authentic' item, that is one that exists outside the field of economic transactions, is of course made manifest through a cash economy.

I heard about a similar incident from a Tibetan woman whose elderly mother had served tea to two American women who had shown up, with guide in tow, in her small village in Tibet around 1988. The Americans became enamored of a wooden tea bowl, saying they would return the next day to buy it. When the two women returned, their happy expressions turned to dismay – maybe even anger – when they were presented with the bowl that mother and daughter had spent the better part of the morning scrubbing with sand and water in order to remove the patina of dirt and oil. Having made an old bowl new, my friend found that the Injis didn't want it. 'And now, all around Kathmandu,' she said, 'the new is made to look old, so that foreigners will want it.'

An economy of cultural production: the magic of objects

The economy of Bodhanath has several main facets, all intrinsically linked to extra-local forces, even as the 'local' quality of economic production is essential in maintaining the commodities produced as expressions of authentic Tibetan 'culture.' That is to say, the economic transactions of Bodhanath depend to varying degrees on a notion of culture – and its localization – for their viability in the local and world markets. Not *all* 'Tibetan' carpets produced in Nepal and exported to say, Germany, sell in Cologne because of the consumer's perception of a bond between the carpet and some imagined Tibet (some are bought, no doubt, because of their relatively cheap price and sturdy character). For some tourists the carpet may be a memento, indexing little more than 'I was there.' But for the Tibet enthusiast or for the Western Buddhist, the carpet is evocative (connotative) of a whole string of signifiers and signifieds. One Tibetan retailer in Kathmandu noted:

> I have learned about what the Americans and the Germans like. Americans don't like the modern designs we made for Germans, or the really large sizes, right? Americans like the *traditional* sizes and designs. Dragons, lotus flowers, the tiger [striped] carpet … They want to know what everything [the various designs] means … Now even the sales to Germany are down I heard, so maybe we need to make more traditional designs for them too.

Before returning to the link between tradition, meanings and sales, a sketch of the carpet industry itself is called for; indeed, its importance cannot be overstated. The production of thick wool carpets, a traditional craft in pre-1959 Tibet, has been the single greatest cause for the economic success of Tibetan refugees in Nepal. Ann Forbes' *Settlements of Hope* (1989) – which I borrow liberally from here – recounts the arrival of Tibetans in Nepal following the Dalai Lama's flight in 1959, and documents the early efforts of various Western aid agencies (the UN High Council on Refugees, the International Red Cross, and especially, and most sustainedly, organizations associated with the Swiss government), as well as individuals, groups and the government itself within the Kingdom of Nepal, to aid the refugees. Accounts of its genesis vary (Forbes 1989: 49), but by 1961 carpet weaving had been introduced to the main refugee camp in Jawalakhel, Kathmandu, as a means to provide self-sufficiency to Tibetan exiles while avoiding any competition with already established Nepalese businesses and trades. In 1966, the Swiss Association for Technical Assistance, the principal grassroots organizer of the carpet initiative, joined with the Dalai Lama and the Jawalakhel Tibetans in forming an *export* company, from which the Swiss withdrew some ten years later, leaving it to the management of Tibetans. Meanwhile, several private Tibetan carpet companies had sprung up in the early 1970s; these have continued to multiply and now command a greater share of the market than those factories linked to the Tibetan government-in-exile. What began in the 1960s as a very small industry, where labor was largely Tibetan,

became a factory-fueled export industry – the top-grossing export business in Nepal in the early 1990s – run by Tibetan managers with a largely non-Tibetan labor pool.[15]

Much of this labor force is composed of women and children. This and the environmental degradation caused by carpet factories have led to vociferous Western (and to a lesser extent, Nepalese) criticism of the industry and its managers. The very enterprise that drives Tibetan success is emblematic of the real tensions between the realities of daily life for many Tibetans in Kathmandu – striving for material success – and the desires and imaginings on the part of Westerners who come to Bodhanath to experience a 'Tibetan culture' that is pure, religious and simple. Such imaginings are deflated by the sight of Tibetan factory owners driving Nissan Pathfinders on their way around the Chorten. Unfortunately, it is also the very visible wealth of some Tibetans in the carpet and antique business that has made local Nepalese less than sympathetic toward *all* Tibetans who live in their country. As Nepalese friends asked numerous times in the course of my research, 'How can they be *refugees* when they are so rich?'

Tibetan carpet factories lie on the outskirts of the Bodhanath community (or outside of Bodhanath altogether), behind walls that help keep the curious and critical gaze of 'Green' Westerners at bay. The other economic mainstays of Bodhanath depend on their proximity to the Chorten as well as the degree to which they are *visible* to foreign patrons. Hotels/guest houses and restaurants benefit from the Western Buddhist desire to stay in the precincts of the Chorten; in the period from 1984 (my first visit to Bodhanath) to 1994, the number of restaurants and hotels catering primarily to Westerners at least tripled (there are even more there now). Still, despite the urban sprawl of Kathmandu, Bodhanath remains a bit too far on the edge of the city to be a 'central' location for tourists wishing to be close to good restaurants, up-scale shopping (except for Buddhist and Tibetan antiques), and the 'must see' sites (largely temples and Newar palaces) of Kathmandu and Patan. Besides, as one visitor exclaimed to me, 'It's even dirtier than the rest of the city!' But neither the 'Tibetan' carpet factories nor the hotels and restaurants that serve 'Tibetan' food are the real attractions for tourists or Western Buddhists. These are the huge Chorten itself, which at dusk and early morning is alive with circumambulating Tibetans (and other Buddhists); nearby Tibetan Buddhist monasteries; and shops selling Tibetan curios and antiques.

* * *

Tibetans in Bodhanath are well aware of their economic dependence on extra-local markets and forces. Shopkeepers, when asked how their businesses were faring during my year and a half stay in 1993–1994, often commented that 'business is not so good now' and cited the ramifications of the Gulf War on international travel and the Nepal government's controversial decision to increase visa fees for tourists. And certainly all of the shopkeepers around Bodhanath are very aware of the seasonal cycle of tourists to Nepal, especially when Western travelers are scarce during the hot months of May, June and the

following monsoon (generally June through early September). One of my friends, a Tibetan woman with a small shop, listened patiently as I talked with her about my research and about Western Buddhists in Bodhanath. But on a hot day in July, she had other more important things on her mind, to which any distinction between Western Buddhists and Western tourists must have seemed irrelevant. 'Now it is difficult. Too hot and no foreigners. How can we eat without foreign [travelers]. Who else will buy these things?' She told me that if she and her friends sold food, then the seasonal cycle of tourists would not be important. When I asked if Indian tourists, who are in Kathmandu in significant numbers in the hot season and its following monsoon, might not buy her wares, she pointed at her Tibetan knick-knacks, Bhutanese 'blankets' and various necklaces: 'No, no, they don't buy these things!' Perhaps half of the shopkeepers of Bodhanath are not Tibetan but Newari, and they (along with many other Nepalese and Tibetans I spoke with) perceived Western people as enamored of 'Tibet,' coming to Bodhanath in order to see the Chorten, visit lamas and buy Tibetan things.(see figure 4)

Small shops circling the Chorten's wide base have proliferated since my first visit to Nepal in 1984; there are now many that might best be termed 'boutiques,' catering to those travelers, or art dealers, with discriminating sensibilities and suitably calibrated budgets. In mid-1994 there were perhaps five or six of these shops on the plaza surrounding the Chorten; there were two others on the main street almost directly across from the gate that leads onto the Chorten's plaza. More than half of these boutiques were run by Newar businessmen, and of these, most featured high-quality Newar Buddhist statuary/ritual objects recently made in Patan, in some cases alongside older ritual objects, jewelry and antique carpets (Newar and Tibetan in origin). The remaining Tibetan-run shops predominantly featured antique Tibetan objects.

The boutiques have large storefront windows with careful displays of antiques and fine objects, urging the passers-by to pause, take in the visual feast, and 'come in, come in.' They exist alongside the older shops, whose windows – if there are any – are crammed full of a huge jumble of newer jewelry, religious objects and statuary made in Nepal. There are also boxes or folding-beds set up as tables in the plaza by Tibetans like my friend Tsering, who can then display her goods without having to pay an exorbitant rent.[16] Some shops, especially the 'boutiques,' concentrate on particular items. One might offer fine (contempor ary) statuary of Buddhist wisdom deities and Buddhas, fashioned from gold, silver or more commonly copper and bronze, alongside bowls, ewers and other offering vessels, likewise richly engraved or detailed. Another shop presents mainly old carpets and other 'antiques' from pre-1959 Tibet, such as porcelain, knives and swords, ritual implements, such as rosaries, made from amber or ivory, and more. Although in theory it is illegal for objects over a hundred years old to be removed from Nepal, in some shops, if one knows how/who to ask, older objects will turn up in a 'store room.' One friend of mine, who displayed objects that were obviously over a century old, told me that it was not a problem: 'these are Tibetan, not Nepalese, and there will be no confusion about that at

customs.' And yet, as I mention in a moment, there is often a very pronounced confusion about the provenance of some of these objects, a confusion that can be quite profitable for shopkeepers aware of Western desires.

The variety and price range of objects for sale, as well as their mode of presentation, are calibrated in response to the diversity of tastes and desires among foreign buyers. Such tastes are the result of powerful discursive practices ordered by class and educational backgrounds (Bourdieu 1984), but also formed by desire and expectation – equally subject to the workings of productive discourses – in relation to the semiotic field of 'Tibet.' A sense of refinement, of acute perception, is what seems to separate consumers in Bodhanath; the proud collectors and antique hounds, buoyed by their sense of nearly moral superiority over the mass of other tourists, (re)produce their identities through shopping. As Susan Stewart writes in *On Longing*, 'Refinement has to do with not only the articulation of detail but also the articulation of difference, an articulation that has increasingly served the interests of class' (1993: 29).

The relationship between objects and consumers, how a person experiences the object in front of her, is informed by the tastes and expectations that are provided by the viewer. Without them the object is mute – unable to communicate any significance. As mentioned above, taste and desire, closely linked to our expectations of what a given class of objects *should be like*, are intensely individual, indeed caught up in our very sense of self-identity; these tastes and desires are also constituted by far wider discourses surrounding race, gender, class and national heritage. Whether one has read about Bodhanath in the *Nepal Guidebook* or *Fodor's* guide, or has read about Tibetans (indexed by the person of HH Dalai Lama in the newspapers back home) or Buddhism from other sources, all of these sources form the basis for an apprehension of what is, initially at least, a cultural 'other.' The 'foreign' object presents itself as 'foreign' culture *materialized* to a foreigner who reads it as a sign of alterity.

For example, the majority of higher end non-antique goods sold around Bodhanath – whether statues, jewelry, thangkas (Tibetan religious paintings on cloth) or objects for ritual use – are made by local Newars. Yet some of the less scrupulous shopkeepers told tourists that such objects were 'from Tibet' or 'very old,' and oftentimes the tourists merely assumed this themselves: after all, isn't a prayer wheel 'Tibetan'? The link to the land beyond the Himalaya, the object's purported origin *there*, can imbue it with a quality that outshines the object's status as a 'mere' commodity. For Walter Benjamin, the aura of an art object depends on its uniqueness, which rests on the authenticity and historical duration of the piece. Further, in his discussion of the aura of natural objects, Benjamin defines this elusive quality, its aura, 'as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be' (1969 [1936]: 222). The quality of the 'Tibetan' object that seems to make it radiate something to the examiner is likewise predicated on its perceived provenance – its historical weight and origin location – and its profound alterity, its 'distance, however close it may be.'

Benjamin tells us that in the age of art's mechanical reproduction, the aura of

art objects – their unique historicity – decays. Given this state of affairs, people will seek to 'get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction' (1969 [1936]: 223). In so doing, the distance that the aura is predicated upon collapses; no longer is there a space between the object and the viewer. In applying the notion of aura to objects in Bodhanath, we encounter consumptive practices in a transcultural setting untheorized by Benjamin. Baudrillard, whose work continually stresses the importance of consumption in the late capitalist era, argues emphatically that everything produced and exchanged today is *both* sign and commodity. No object is *simply* a product. Items in Bodhanath exist within a nexus of capital exchange, but also within a framework or form of semiotic exchange in which objects become meaningful. Consumption is precisely 'the stage where the commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are produced as commodities.'[17]

Certain tourists and many Western Buddhists are after nothing if not the aura of the object (or rather, the object with the aura) that is always an 'original,' hence 'authentic,' if one believes it to be. Authenticity means something quite different to a collector in search of Ming or Qing porcelain (which can be found around Bodhanath if one knows where to look), than it does to a tourist or Western Buddhist who wants something 'Tibetan' for friends back home. In the latter case, the authenticity of an object is based first and foremost on its recognizable alterity, its definite foreign feel, its Tibetan aura. Consumers in Bodhanath in search of the *object with presence* might eschew those that seem like reproductions for tourists (seven similar strands of beads placed side by side), and instead buy those that appear more unique ('I haven't seen anything like this before!'). Or they might find objects that have another claim to authenticity. For example, while there may be rows of similar *rdo-rje* and *dril-bu* (these are the ritual scepter and bell, respectively, used in Tantric ceremony) in a shop, all are ritual objects *identical* to the ones monks and lamas actually use; they are not mere reproductions for the tourist market.

For some tourists, the actual provenance of the object is relatively unimportant; what matters is what it represents, how it 'appears.' Perhaps it will evoke the trip that one has taken – experience encapsulated by a token of memory. But it also must give testimony to the 'other' or 'there' (*allos*) nature of what one has encountered at the journey's end. That is, the object must retain its distance, even after one has brought it near. And what of the object's historicity? The little bronze statue (made in Patan) is seen as 'a Tibetan god;' the cap stitched in Kathmandu's Thamel district[18] (and modeled on hats once worn in the mountains of Himachal Pradesh) is a 'Tibetan hat.' In this way, many of the objects being sold around Bodhanath are fetishes of 'Tibet.' That is, in the Marxian sense, the objects become fetishized when the actual history of their production within specific social relations is completely erased; the object then becomes a signifier within the larger discourses that privilege 'Tibet' as an enchanted realm.

The fetish concept is 'discursively promiscuous,' found in political economy, anthropology, and psychiatry, among other disciplines (Pietz 1985: 5). If I

initially used it here in the Marxian sense, it seems even more important to follow the other implications of the fetish. Following Pietz, the fetish can be understood as a critical device that points up an object's very materiality, and illumines the way in which the said object may derive its power through contiguity with other objects, contexts, and feeling states. Relevant to my discussion here, the fetish as a conceptual category seems to have first arisen in transcultural settings (such as colonial West Africa) where difference is marked, produced, and may be distinctly unsettling (*ibid.*: 7). Fetishes represent, then, a kind of totality ('Tibet' or 'Tibetan Buddhism') in a single object; they appear in zones of culture contact and radical difference; they can serve as highly personal indexes of experience.

It is not surprising that where travelers alight, local products speak their alterity – albeit, and importantly, a *recognizable* alterity – to consumers who value them for this very reason. But there is more. Western Buddhists often buy very particular objects *for use* in specific rituals and prayer; the emphasis in this context is on utilizing the object in acting out, or putting Buddhism into practice.[19] Whereas the tourist may envision the ritual objects on sale in Bodhanath as 'exhibition' pieces, the Western Buddhist sensibility retains the object's 'use value,' its connection to ritual life.[20] Yet even when objects such as carpets, jewelry and door hangings – ostensibly having no performative role in 'being a Buddhist' – are bought, they still carry meaning, still conjure associations with 'Tibet' and to 'Buddhism' that make them fetishes imbued with an exotic spirit. Even without being 'used,' as a Buddhist might utilize prayer beads, these objects can still exert effects. Their very contiguity to the buyer, after they are brought home and displayed in one's living environment or worn on one's person, furthers this idea: the objects 'work' idiosyncratically on the individual buyer by giving up some of their essential spirit, as imagined by her, to her:

> Fetishes exist in the world as material objects that 'naturally' embody socially significant values that touch one or more individuals in an intensely personal way: a flag, monument, or landmark; a talisman, medicine-bundle, or sacramental object … Each has that quality of synecdochic fragmentedness or 'detotalized totality'.
>
> (Pietz 1985: 13–14)

Pietz continues by noting that the discourse of the fetish is always bound up with both reification and the reduction of a 'totality' to a singular object, at the same time that labeling an object a 'fetish' has historically been used as a critique 'about the false objective values of a culture from which the speaker is personally distanced' (*ibid.*). This latter critical edge is absent from the consumptive practices around the Chorten, especially with regards to the buying of 'Tibetan' objects by Western Buddhists. When thangkas, statuary, offering bowls, prayer beads or ritual implements are purchased, these objects become transformative tools in the hands and home of a Buddhist. Such objects are often used in the composition of an altar, which may range from a small collection of statues

and/or photographs of Tibetan lamas, before which offerings are placed, to immense collections of sacred images and paraphernalia housed in distinct rooms in some of the wealthier Tibetan and expatriate Buddhist homes around Bodhanath. The latter shrine rooms (which Tibetans often call a *lha-khang* or *chos-khang*) provide a space for Buddhist ritual activity and (largely in the case of Western practitioners) meditation that is separated from the rest of the house and its orientation toward mundane affairs. Whatever its size, some kind of altar was present in every Tibetan and Western expatriate Buddhist house I have ever visited, and there were even makeshift, scaled-down versions in most of the hotel rooms where I visited Western Buddhist travelers. Let us consider some of the objects that might constitute this altar 'collection.'

A sense of Buddhist identity is prerequisite to Westerners buying such objects as *'phreng-ba* ('rosaries'), *damaru* (hand-drum), *dorje* and *drilbu*, offering bowls and sacred images 'for use.' Yet as they are used, ostensibly in rituals that are meant to aid one's spiritual awakening, they also work upon the user, reinforcing a Buddhist self-identification. The altar as a whole is both rule-governed (set up 'just so' according to customary practical logic) and also idiosyncratic. The statues and photographs that one chooses to display reflect one's own identity as a student of this teacher, or a devotee of that *yi-dam* (meditational or Tantric tutelary deity). As a 'collection' of objects, a Buddhist altar, especially a Western Buddhist one, not only reflects one's personal and spiritual identity, but also rests as a testament to conspicuous consumption of certain types of objects.[21] As Susan Stewart points out:

> When objects are defined in terms of their use value, they serve as extensions of the body into the environment, but when objects are defined by the collection, such an extension is inverted, serving to subsume the environment to a scenario of the personal. The ultimate term in the series that marks the collection is the 'self,' the articulation of the collector's own 'identity.'
>
> (1993: 162)

What we have in the case of Western Buddhists' altars, made up of objects acquired over a long period (and indeed one Western Buddhist in Bodhanath told me that his 'altar keeps expanding'), is a collection of objects that emphatically are *for use*. I want to undo Stewart's opposition of use-value and collection here, because the other elements of her statement here seem so apt in tracing the logic of the 'altar collection.' Through making offerings, venerating teachers and deities, or sitting before the altar in meditation, Western Buddhists both 'extend' their bodies and minds into a larger environment, but also 'subsume' that environment – in this case a 'foreign' Tibetan Buddhist one – into their very persons as they enact a Tibetan Buddhist identity.

* * *

While objects not only index identities, but help to strengthen a Buddhist sense of self *through use* of the object, my Tibetan friends told me of other, deeper, less easily traceable ways in which objects come to work their productive magic. Certainly, many shopkeepers, lodge owners and small grocers in Bodhanath depend on Western Buddhists for the success of their businesses. Several Newars and Tibetans expressed their satisfaction with selling Buddhist objects to Western Buddhists, where they would be used to 'create virtue and merit' (*dge-ba* and *bsod-nams*), which in turn produce fortunate results in the future.

Such discussion led me to wonder about all the *tourists* who buy Tibetan prayer beads, statuary, even little earrings with ritual daggers (*phur-bu*) or *dorjes* on them. And I am not the only one. Frank Korom begins his *Old Age Tibet in New Age America* (1997: 73), a discussion of the appropriation of things Tibetan for new purposes, with a vignette about a non-Buddhist woman in his anthropology class who wears a miniature around her neck. Would Tibetans be as put off by this as I? Wearing ritual objects for jewelry? Buddhas on the TV table or next to an ashtray? Drolma, a 50-year old woman, shrugged off my concerns: It's okay that they [the tourists] don't know what these things mean. We tell them to put the statues and thangkas (i.e. physical representations of the Buddha) in a nice high place. These things can still bring them some benefit.

Gelek, a 24-year-old monk I spoke with, was more emphatic, explaining to me the Buddhist logic behind the power of a sacred object, how it 'works' – even on a tourist or a non-Buddhist (*phyi-pa*). To paraphrase Gelek, the attraction that the observer of sacred art, objects or symbols feels is due to connections (*'brel-ba*)[22] made with such material in previous lives. More importantly, if a non-Buddhist buys a statue, takes a picture of an image of the Buddha, or wears a Buddhist 'rosary' around her neck, the object may make her think: what is this thing I see or that I'm wearing? What does it mean? How is it used? Maybe that person will try to find out more about the Dharma in this lifetime, Gelek said, and even if they don't, an auspicious connection (*bkra-shis rten-'brel*) is made for future lives. It is like a seed in your mind, waiting to grow.

Signifying identities

Within the signifying properties of commodities is also their productive force. Just as the curio or antique comes to represent a certain Tibetan essence, Western consumer practices in these sites determine in part how one's identity is understood: we are what we buy. When asked to define what it is that separates them from tourists, most Western Buddhists looked at me bewildered, and then mentioned their deeper level of engagement with Tibetans, with Tibetan culture, and most specifically with Tibetan Buddhism. Their sense of a belief system shared with Tibetans, and a rejection of the materialist/'Western' values that so many 'tourists' seem to exhibit, are fundamental to the construction of a Buddhist identity in the environs of Bodhanath.

Certainly those Westerners who call themselves Buddhists have a far deeper engagement with Tibetans – primarily religious teachers – in the context of the

monastery than non-Buddhists do, as we shall soon see. For Western Buddhists the very reason to be in Bodhanath is to meet learned masters and take advantage of the great opportunities for Buddhist study and practice. While tour groups, or individual tourists, occasionally appear at the main door of a Bodhanath temple, peering inside as the monks and lamas perform their rites, Western Buddhists slip off their shoes, make the triple prostration to the holy images, and then take a seat on the floor. While the tourist hangs back, aware of the difference between herself and the 'other' even as it is reinscribed by her distancing gape, the Western Buddhist is often hyper-aware of the self/other divide yet seeks to undo it through active participation (strategies well known to anthropologists in the field), such as living with Tibetans, learning the Tibetan language, wearing Tibetan clothing.

It is tempting to locate Western Buddhists, and the production of a 'Western Buddhist' identity, largely within the space of Tibetan monasteries and the practical experience taken up there. This sets up a contrast to tourists, who are always outsiders, obviously in search of 'sights' and objects for sale that encapsulate both the 'culture' on display and their own experiences of it (i.e. as a memento). But many Western Buddhists are shopping too, though many of the objects that they buy are religious or ritual implements that anchor one's identity *qua* Buddhist.

In conclusion, the 'tourist' and 'pilgrim' (in this case 'Western Buddhist') identities discussed here are not entirely collapsible, but neither are they distinct a priori identities. Both arise in the context of global consumer capitalism, more specifically in a discursive field of modernity that seeks an authentic cultural other beyond the disenchanted world the West occupies. In Bodhanath, the different 'tourist' and 'Buddhist' subjectivities take on their specificity through practice – that is, everyday activities – and through imagination. Western Buddhists, whether buying ritual objects or attending seminars on meditation and Buddhist philosophy at the monasteries, enter into a more complex interaction with local Tibetans than tourists do. While the tourist gaze reinscribes the distance/difference between 'self' and the Tibetan 'other,' the Western Buddhist often attempts to close this gap, with Buddhism as the ostensible bridge linking East and West.

Yet the slippage between these two categories – 'tourist' and 'pilgrim' – is apparent. Both 'tourists' and 'Western Buddhists' are fundamentally foreigners in Bodhanath, propelled by a desire for experiences of authenticity. Even as Tibetans-in-exile must remake and remember their culture and traditions for themselves, they are aware of the transnational audience that appreciates, and sometimes seeks to appropriate, their perceived essence. Tourists and Western Buddhists search for an 'actual' Tibetan culture as they imagine it to be: pure, spiritual and without the stain of commodification. Ironically, it is the presentation of Tibetan culture in sites like the shops and monasteries of Bodhanath that attracts Western travelers even as it causes some of these same travelers, tourist and Buddhist alike, to feel that the 'authentic' Tibetan culture or cultural essence has eluded them.

My friend Tsering wanted to sell her goods, but found that her own prayer beads, outside of the realm of economic transactions, proved more attractive. And the old Tibetan bowl, once cleaned up for sale, had its very authenticity – the aura of use *in situ* – scrubbed right off. The final erasure of the economic register is evidenced by some Western Buddhists who forget that they, like the tourists around the Chorten, come from the middle and upper classes of the West. Local Tibetans do not forget, even if Western Buddhists do, that any and all journeys require the accumulation of expendable capital. In a crass reduction of various stereotypes that I heard repeated around the Chorten, we could say that the 'greedy Tibetans' wait for the 'naïve Westerners' to part with their money, itself a down-payment on the travelers' dreams of pious Tibetans and a life uncomplicated by the 'modern West.' In the following chapters, the locus of the search for authenticity shifts from the marketplace to what for most Western Buddhists is really the main event: the monasteries and teaching lamas of Bodhanath.

4 Monasteries, patrons and the presence of money in a spiritualized economy

If Western consumers find objects that speak to them in the market of Bodhanath, objects that Western Buddhists utilize and tourists carry away as mementos, we might consider further how monumental objects such as Tibetan monasteries are situated within Western and Tibetan imaginaries. As in the previous chapter, notions of 'culture' (and its doppelgänger, religion), and 'authenticity' are prevalent in descriptive discourses around Bodhanath that read the monasteries as signposts, while everywhere the presence of 'the economic,' especially as it operates through religious patronage, is both encouraged and shunned. The fear, for some Western travelers especially, is that Tibetan Buddhism will become (or is becoming) yet another 'commodity' produced by the monstrous forces of modernity that we in the West carry with us like a virus, and that will wreak havoc upon those natives/Others we encounter. The concern for many Tibetans is that without economic aid, their culture and the transmission of Buddhist teaching lineages will be lost.

Buddhism can become something to not only observe as a spectator, but something to observe, or take up, as a participant. As Vincanne Adams writes:

> The perceived desirability of being Buddhist in the Himalayan tourist economy cannot be underestimated. The streets of Bodhinath, the Buddhist mecca on the outskirts of Kathmandu, are lined with foreign Buddhists making pilgrimages from their Western homelands to the holy places of Nepal. When a four-year-old reincarnate Buddhist lama was brought from Bhutan and placed on his throne in a Kathmandu monastery, more Western Buddhists were in attendance than Nepalese, Bhutanese or Tibetan Buddhists.
>
> (1996: 53)

Why is it desirable to move from the ranks of 'Himalayan tourist' to a subject position marked as 'Buddhist pilgrim'? The latter designation seems to presuppose that the difference between Western self and Himalayan other has been narrowed by sharing an ontological space marked as 'Buddhist,' a presupposition that is called into question throughout this book. But Adams' transnational tableau is evocative for the following discussion as well, in that it points up the

multi-national character of this 4-year-old lama's following, his return to the monastery (built by his previous incarnation) in Bodhanath, and additionally, for what is not mentioned in her brief description.

The crowd at the enthronement was made up of Himalayan Buddhists as well as Western Buddhists and curiosity seekers, but it was also hard to miss the large contingent of disciples from Taiwan, all similarly attired, who had chartered a plane for their trip to the enthronement; there were also devotees who had traveled from Hong Kong. The importance of East Asian disciples in the monastic economy of Bodhanath cannot be gainsaid, nor can the sometimes problematic nature of wealth in the burgeoning Tibetan monasteries. The tulku being enthroned on that day in 1993 was the young Dudjom Rinpoche, mentioned briefly in chapter 2. Though his predecessor was widely renowned as a great scholar and meditator, this young incarnation initially faced some difficulties. According to rumor, it was not the child's qualities as a bona fide tulku that were in doubt, but rather the ownership of the previous Dudjom tulku's accumulated financial holdings that became the object of contestation.

Rebuilding tradition: the monasteries in Bodhanath

This chapter explores the outlines of monastery building in Bodhanath, focusing on the particular gompa (*dgon-pa*, in this context 'monastery') and their tulku-founders that have been most influential in attracting Westerners interested in Buddhism. Thematically the focus is on the religious, economic and political connections between Tibetan Buddhist masters and their (especially foreign) disciples, and how these bonds are forged within the framework of what is perceived by most lamas and their students as normative Buddhist discourse. These connections are also informed, if not launched, by Western desires to draw closer to the authentic Buddhism that is enshrined in Bodhanath's monasteries. I will therefore have much to say about the lay patron–spiritual preceptor relationship that makes monastery building possible, and, throughout the chapter will call attention to its more unsettling aspects. I highlight the wider economic linkages that enable the construction and maintenance of Bodhanath's monasteries, but also call attention to the significance of 'money' within (neo)Dharmic discourses: religious patronage is solicited (by Tibetans) and is certainly offered by many devout foreign Buddhists. At the same time, the obvious presence of the 'material' made manifest in objects and cash within a space marked as 'spiritual' is repressed, lamented and contested by some Western Buddhist travelers.

Let me begin with the obvious, however: the representation of the monastery as traditional institution nonpareil, that part of the Tibetan past that has returned to watch over the present and future in exile. Anne Forbes comments in *Settlements of Hope* that:

> Tibetan Buddhism was the foundation of Tibetan culture as it existed on the Tibetan plateau before the Chinese invasion. By the time of the invasion,

> monasteries had become the country's greatest social and economic force; every secular official was mirrored by a monk, and the country was ruled by the reincarnation of a god … Monasteries in exile continue to serve as the spiritual backbone of the Tibetan community; they have provided the Tibetans with a continuity and stability vital to their successful adjustment as refugees … In exile, the monastic community provides an essential link to the past.
>
> (1989: 86–89)

Forbes is certainly correct in her assessment of the prime importance that the monastic institution played in Tibet prior to Chinese occupation. But it is important to avoid the homogenization of a wide range of institutions, ranging from a village temple run by part-time religious specialists to the celibate great teaching monasteries of central and Eastern Tibet, under the term 'gompa' (Samuel 1993: 309–310). As Geoffrey Samuel points out:

> It is commonplace to think of premodern Tibet as a land of monasteries, and it certainly contained some very large monastic establishments. Celibate monasticism in traditional Tibetan societies was nevertheless neither as uniform nor as extensive as is often supposed.
>
> (1993: 309–310)

Here I use the term gompa (unless otherwise noted) to mark the celibate monasteries of Bodhanath, nearly all of which have been modeled upon the large teaching gompa of pre-diaspora Tibet, and were built by lamas who generally hailed from such institutions themselves. In the following chapter, which serves as an addendum to this one, I will examine the ways in which the monastery and more particularly the monastic, have become fraught images, figuring not only spiritual community and links to the past, but the Tibetan nation *in absentia* as well. In the context of encounters with Buddhism, the gompas of Bodhanath are among the most important sites in which Tibetans and Western visitors have contact with – or reinscribe their distance from – the essential mysteries of their own and the Other's identity.

If the shops in Bodhanath have increased in number and size since my first visit to Nepal in 1984, the number of monasteries has nearly tripled since then (there were approximately twenty-one monasteries in the vicinity of Bodhanath as of 1994).[1] The gompas rise out of what was once agricultural land, some just on the edge of the circular plaza that surrounds Jarungkhashor Chorten, others further from the monument amidst two and three-story concrete apartment buildings, and still others are built on several acres of land with brick and plaster walls sealing off their compounds from the growing sprawl of the neighborhood. If one walks up onto the terraced plinths of the Chorten itself, circumambulating its central axis as one ascends, one can see the monasteries in the very near distance, their gilt roofs and red, white and yellow walls drawing in the gaze like no other structures in sight (save the new Hyatt hotel). From the uppermost,

third level of the Chorten, perhaps fifty feet above the ground, you can look northwards toward Shivapuri mountain and the foothills of the Himalaya that ring the Kathmandu Valley. Looking out into the distance, you can just make out Tulku Urgyen's (sprul-sku O-rgyan) white hermitage and nunnery,[2] Nagi Gompa, perched half-way up the side of the northern foothills some miles distant. In the same line of view, but closer in to Bodhanath and situated on low hills that lie approximately an hour's walk away, are Kopan and Pullahari monasteries. Finally, again in the same northern direction, you can see the monasteries of Beru Khyentse (Bee-ru? mkhyen-brtse), Chökyi Nyima (Chos-kyi nyi-ma), Thrangu (Khra-'gu), Pawo (Dpa'-bo) and Dilgo Khyentse (Dil-mgo mkhyen-brtse) Rinpoches, all close by, just a five-minute walk from the Chorten. To the east are a number of other important monasteries from a variety of Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

Though the particular histories of each monastery and its founder are well beyond the scope of my research, it is important to trace the broader outlines of monastery construction in Bodhanath, paying particular attention to its foundationally transnational character. While the gompa vary widely in size, most house between twenty and eighty monks, ranging in ages from the very young (seven or eight years old) to the elderly; it is vital to remember that probably half of these monks, however, are below the age of twenty. In addition, many of the 'Tibetan' monks in the 'Tibetan' monasteries of Bodhanath are not actually Tibetan. Probably two-thirds or more are either from northern border areas within Nepal, and are thus culturally and linguistically related to Tibetan exiles, or they are of Tamang, Newar, even Bhutanese background. Tibetans themselves are quite aware of this, but for many Western Buddhists the label 'Tibetan monk' renders any other less exotic ethnicity invisible.

All of the four main sectarian traditions of Tibetan Buddhism have monasteries in Bodhanath, and as monumental structures built on some of the most expensive land in Nepal, the monasteries of Bodhanath are indices for the wealth of the Tibetan community – or appear to be. In fact, many of the gompas were built by Tibetan lamas with large donations from foreign as well as Tibetan patrons. These patrons or donors, usually referred to in Tibetan as jindak (*sbyin-bdag*), include some Western Buddhists, but also many Chinese Buddhists from Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Chinese donors, unlike Westerners, are rarely new converts to Buddhism, though their keen interest in *Tibetan* Buddhist rituals and the 'power' of the Tibetan lama is part of a discourse that parallels the Western apprehension of Tibet: remote, magical and the site of chthonic forces that the lamas command. According to some Taiwanese that I met in Bodhanath in 1994, Tibetan Buddhism was the 'fastest growing religion' in their homeland.

Many of Bodhanath's monasteries are lavishly decorated, with beautiful murals and statuary adorning the central shrine rooms. Some of the largest and best appointed of these have become brief stops on tourist itineraries. Most important for the discussion here are those few gompas that feature yearly programs on Buddhist topics for Western practitioners of Buddhism, or offer

'retreat' situations and less formal opportunities for instruction. In fact, out of over twenty gompas near the Chorten, only a few had any formal structure for working with Westerners interested in Buddhism: Kopan, Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling (*Bka'-rnying bshad-sgrub gling*), Thrangu (officially known as *Khra-'gu bkra-shis chos-gling*),[3] and, less formally, Shechen Tennyi Dargye Ling (*Zhe-chen bstan-gnyis dar-rgyas gling*). In addition, there is the Marpa Institute that was established by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso (*Mkhan-po* Tshul-khrims rgya-mtsho) specifically for training Western students in Buddhist practice and translation work. The monasteries named above are outwardly little different from their counterparts that do not attract Western students, but word spreads quickly amongst Western Buddhist travelers in Bodhanath as to which lamas (in which gompas) might be accessible to receive teachings from, and whether or not the lama speaks English or has a translator.

One of the primary reasons for the success of just a few monasteries in attracting Western students is that their resident lamas have consciously set out to accommodate Westerners by providing the infrastructure, qualified translators and physical setting necessary for this education. This was certainly the case for Lama Thubten Yeshe (Thub-bstan ye-shes) and Lama Zopa (Bzod-pa) Rinpoches who together built Kopan, and it became evident at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling (usually referred to as Tulku Urgyen or Tulku Chökyi Nyima's gompa), as described below. Most of Bodhanath's monasteries were established by what are sometimes referred to as 'grandfather lamas,' an older generation of teachers who completed their training in Tibet and came into exile after they had already reached middle age. Building a gompa in Bodhanath was seen as a preeminently religious work that would preserve, maintain and indeed renew the Buddhadharma. From the wider perspective of someone like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, such work is also cultural, for monasteries uphold the essential heart of Tibetan culture now under threat in its homeland (cf. Dalai Lama 1991: 4–5). For most Tibetan Buddhist masters in exile, building a monastery is not so much about *new* beginnings and innovation, but rather a re-building of their monasteries in Tibet, with the very specific aim of maintaining and spreading the ritual, philosophical, even artistic traditions of their *particular* Tibetan Buddhist lineages.

In order to build a monastery in exile a number of conditions were necessary, and still are for those who are attempting to build around Bodhanath or Swayambhunath (the other main Buddhist site, also crowned by a stupa, in Kathmandu) today: available land, communities from whom the monastic Sangha can be drawn (including both young novices and at least a quorum of older monks already trained in ritual and scholarship), and most importantly, jindak or patrons who can provide the financial wherewithal to begin such a large undertaking. It is also apparent, though little discussed, that Tibetan lamas must come to terms with the Nepalese state and its representatives when building such large structures on land that can only be owned by Nepalese citizens.[4] Thus, the building of a gompa – and its maintenance – are largely dependent on the charisma, connections and activity of the founding lama himself.

Patrons of religion and the economy of merit

Far removed from the economic situation of pre-1959 Tibet, in which large monasteries held land, or more properly, the labor of people attached to said land, the new gompas built in exile depend primarily upon donation from jindak, that is, lay sponsors, to survive.[5] Without the presence of a tulku of repute, who serves as the object of largesse, the gompa is less likely to appear as a suitable place for donors to offer financial and material support. The frequent trips that some Tibetan teachers in Bodhanath make to the USA, Europe, and especially Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, to give teachings and perform religious rituals are vitally important to the economies of Bodhanath's gompas. By acting in their religious roles, and as representations of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha incarnate, tulku are the most suitable recipients of donations from pious lay Buddhists; hence they are able to raise significant funds for their monasteries and for other religious work.

My initial research assumption, that Western Buddhists were the *primary* economic force behind the monastery boom in Bodhanath, was denied by nearly every Tibetan and expatriate Buddhist I spoke with in 1993 and 1994. First, while Western Buddhists do sponsor ritual events, offer donations for day-to-day upkeep of specific monasteries and their inhabitants, and contribute to the construction costs of some of Bodhanath's monasteries, local Tibetans are also involved as jindak. The scale of their sponsorship has probably been on the increase since the 1980s, as some Kathmandu Tibetans have made fortunes through the carpet industry and through trade in Tibetan antiques. But the consistently largest donors, according to several Tibetan lamas, are Chinese Buddhists from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. When I asked lay and monastic Tibetans, Western Buddhists and a few Taiwanese to explain this, they all initially said the same thing: Chinese donors, like Tibetans, have grown up with Buddhism. They are *already* familiar with the idea of religious sponsorship (Skt. dana; Tibetan *sbyin*, pronounced 'jin') and they want to give as much as they can. Later in this chapter, we return to the notion of a 'natural' jindak, and the ways in which this practice becomes a site for identifying cultural and 'Buddhist' differences.

There has been a great deal written about *dana*, the religiously sanctioned practice of 'generosity' or selfless giving, by scholars concerned with the anthropology of Buddhism, especially in Theravadin societies like Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka. Giving donations to the Sangha and sponsoring religious activity are a central activity of lay Tibetan Buddhists as well (Samuel 1993: 208–209). Tibetan monks, and to a lesser degree, even lay Tibetan Buddhist practitioners, represent a 'field of merit' similar to their Theravadin counterparts: the donor 'sows' financial support for the religious specialists' undertakings and thereby 'reaps' spiritual merit (*bsod-nams*). But it is the spiritually adept and religiously learned *lama*, and in particular the tulku, who is the most prominent object of religious gifting.

The Tibetan term 'jindak', is itself a gloss of the Sanskrit *danapati*; within the

Tibetan Buddhist context, the term most commonly refers to lay sponsors of monastic (or other non-monastic religious specialist) rituals, or to those who give money to fund the building of religious monuments, especially monasteries. In Bodhanath, both Tibetan and foreign jindaks patronize *particular* monasteries, both because of their own sectarian affiliations and because of their relationships with individual tulkus. Those donors who are wealthy enough can become prominent jindak to their lamas; nevertheless, all Tibetans tend to make donations (of whatever size) to the tulku and monastery that they rely upon for ritual services.

When I attended the ritual consecration (*rabs-gnas*) and attendant ceremonies of a huge four-story 'medical center' on the outskirts of Bodhanath in August 1993, the Tibetan jindak, whom I was told was the owner of a large carpet factory, was conspicuous by his involvement in what otherwise was an entirely clerical ceremony observed by lay spectators.[6] The jindaks theoretically receive (nothing but) spiritual merit in return for their theoretically selfless donations, but in fact they often accrue symbolic capital in the community, as well as increased access to and favors from their spiritual preceptor.[7] As a devout Tibetan lay woman told me, the lama or monastery that benefits from a jindak's gift 'returns' this donation to a wider community by building images, conducting rituals, printing sacred texts that 'of course' benefit everyone. In a discourse predicated on notions of modern development and public health, the same might be said about the construction of medical centers for public benefit as well. Later in this chapter I explore the other side of the jindak and lama-recipient relationship, wherein the ideal Buddhist roles are troubled by the realities of monetary transactions in a transnational setting. For if the jindak is the ideal lay Buddhist, he or she can also function as the epitome of worldly greed and attachment to power; one who wants to buy the Dharma but not necessarily practice it.

Both Klieger (1988) and Adams (1996) discuss the jindak role as it has been adopted and in some cases reworked in a transnational setting, wherein Westerners become patrons to not only Tibetan lamas and their monasteries, but to *lay* Tibetans (or Sherpas) as well. That is, both scholars make plain that the logic of sponsorship easily moves into other types of relationship, especially in transnational meeting grounds like Kathmandu.[8] Certainly Vincanne Adams' comments about jindaks, though based on fieldwork carried out among Sherpas of Khumbu and Kathmandu, hold true for Tibetans in Bodhanath as well. She observes that just as lay Sherpas become jindaks of their local gompas and receive religious merit in return, so Western 'sponsors' are now sought by Sherpa lay people (as well as monastics) as sources of financial support.[9] Thus Sherpas come to play the role of recipient that corresponds to the gompa or lama, while Westerners now become the sponsors. It is important to note that the role of the recipient in both cases, whether a monastery (or monastic) or a lay Sherpa, is essentially *religious*. For as Adams points outs, 'many Westerners imagine virtually all Sherpas to be exemplary Buddhists and holders of spiritual knowledge' (*ibid*: 163); that is, Sherpas are deemed worthy recipients of donations partly to the degree that they live up to their Buddhist natures. And as she suggests in her

discussion of biomedicine in the Khumbu region, it is not only Buddhism that operates through discursive practices associated with 'selfless' giving. Western development and, in particular medical aid, are, like Buddhism, concerned with educating, improving and ultimately 'civilizing' their subjects.[10]

I might point out that in the Buddhist idiom it is the *donor* who is ultimately tamed (and ideally, liberated) by the *giving*, whereas in Western aid programs, it is the *recipient* who is improved by the *gifts*. The practice of generosity undertaken without selfish aims is, after all, the first among the six classical 'perfections' central to Mahayana Buddhism; when combined with the supreme thought of wishing to attain enlightenment for the sake of all suffering beings, it becomes a cause for Buddhahood. Generosity as an attitude and as a practice to be observed are mentioned throughout popular teaching texts from every Tibetan Buddhist tradition; it is also a topic that is prominent in many Tibetan didactic and morality tales. When it comes to calculating the merit one will reap from being generous, the importance of the donor's (selfless) *attitude* is far greater than the actual amount or type of offering given. But while lay and monastic Tibetans often remarked to me that it is best to give without any judgment of whether the recipient is truly deserving or not – 'just give!' – Western donors, whether Buddhists or aid organizations, are oftentimes concerned from the outset that their 'gift' will go to a deserving, indeed, authentic, Other.

I recall one American woman telling me that she wanted to sponsor a Tibetan monk, but she had heard that many of the monks around Bodhanath are 'not really Tibetan.' Was she determined to sponsor only a *Tibetan* monk because she somehow equated that with a more 'pure' (and supposedly understandable) ethnic identity? Or was 'Tibetan' also associated with economic privation in her mind, thus making a 'real' Tibetan more worthy of support? This latter association emerged in a separate and very difficult encounter I had with a Nepalese member of Parliament whom I met through a friend. Over tea at his residence I had surprised him by apologizing for my minimal Nepali skills, this despite having been in the country for over a year and having made several previous visits to his country. When I explained that I did work with Tibetans, he looked momentarily angry, and then said he had a question for me about Tibetans: why is it that Western people always wish to 'sponsor them and not our children?' He wondered whether it had to do with the term 'refugee,' noting that in the Kathmandu of the early 1990s, 'I am sorry to say, but Tibetan people – they are more wealthy than us!'

Many Euro-American friends, both residents in Kathmandu, and those who had passed through as tourists, became sponsors of Tibetans, especially paying for children's education at boarding schools in India and Nepal. These generous donors were always concerned about whom to give to, for in many ways the entire city seemed deserving. From our conversations it was clear that both virtuous character *and* economic hardship were the key attributes that define a worthy lay recipient. Still, judging from a Tibetan friend's scathing comments about well-off Tibetans who manage to secure *multiple* foreign sponsors for a single child, or even for children that have dropped out of school altogether, it

would appear that the qualities of honesty and simplicity, as well as penury, are too often assumed by Westerners who regard all Tibetans as essentially 'Buddhist' and as 'refugees,' with all that those terms connote.

Monastic beginnings in Bodhanath

In the following sections of this chapter, I present partial sketches of the most important monasteries in Bodhanath as indicated by Western Buddhist travelers and expatriates. At the same time, I revisit general themes already introduced – transnational linkages, the centrality of the lama as founder and charismatic center of the monastery, jindaks and discipleship, and authenticity – in more particular contexts. I focus on only a few of Bodhanath's gompa, deliberately using materials collected in specific monasteries to make points that are salient for the greater landscape of Bodhanath. Despite the artificiality of such a representation, it helps to contextualize the development of monasteries in Bodhanath as it occurs within the nexus of economy and religion, particularly amidst the conditions of transnational travel and extranational exile.

* * *

What might appear as a nearly static landscape to the first-time traveler, dominated by monasteries and the Chorten, is in fact a Bodhanath that most other long-term residents of the area (including Western expatriates) recollect as a place radically transformed by the furious building that began in the late 1970s. For many of my Tibetan shopkeeper friends, the indices of this transformation lay in the opening of their first shop near the Chorten or the steady climb in rent fees; their family's initial move out to 'Bodha' from Thamel or Jawalakhel or, for some of them these days, their family's move away from Bodha (to find a site where land for house-building might actually be affordable, or where rent for a two-bedroom flat is not prohibitive). Bodhanath's manifestly Tibetan character is a relatively recent phenomenon, they reminded me, by referring to the Tamang and Newar people who have long lived in the area, some of whom remain despite the rent inflation caused by both successful Tibetan entrepreneurs and Western Buddhists capable of paying top dollar. Of course, there are some very successful Tamang and Newar businessmen in Bodhanath as well, and a few of them are among the primary landholders in the area. In 1993–1994, the rent for a three- or four-room flat in Bodhanath was often \$150 per month (NRs. 7,500) for foreigners, and sometimes considerably more, depending on amenities; many of my Tibetan interlocutors found this outrageous, and felt that it drove their own rents up.

According to some of my older Tibetan friends who lived around Jarungkhashor Chorten, the oldest *lha-khang*, or temple, in the vicinity was built by the first 'Chini Lama' who settled in the area in the late nineteenth century and had been made custodian of the shrine by the Rana 'king' of the period.[11] The Chini Lama's temple was not a monastery, but a large chapel; in 1994 it

housed a central image of Guru Rinpoche, flanked by Sakyamuni and Avalokitesvara (Chenresi), and its walls were blackened by decades of smoke from the ubiquitous butter lamp offerings presented there. The statues were saved following a disastrous fire in the mid-1990s, and the rebuilding of this temple had begun in earnest in 2001. Although Tibetan Buddhist in orientation, the lhak hang is still maintained by the contemporary head-priest (called by the title of 'Chini Lama') and his family; they are the Tamang-Tibetan descendants of the original Chini Lama. This temple and the smaller chapel built across the circumambulation path from it in the outermost wall of the Chorten itself are central foci for rites performed by these lay Tantric priests in stewardship of the Chorten.

The first monastery proper, now known as *Skyid-grong bsam-gtan gling*, was built as a small house in the late 1940s according to the monk I interviewed there; Fürer-Haimendorf (1989: 103) and Helffer (1993: 116) maintain it was completed in 1959. It was most commonly known around the Chorten as the 'Mongolian gompa' because its founder was a Mongolian lama, Guru Dewa Rinpoche. In 1994 Rinpoche was said to be in his mid-eighties, and when I visited his monastery I was told that he was away in Argentina, where one of his main jindak lives. Apparently Rinpoche has also been active in re-building monasteries in Mongolia, and has sponsors in Taiwan as well. His monastery appears to have had little contact with Western Buddhists for most of its existence, but is interesting for the fact that it is one of the few gompa of the Gelug tradition in the Bodhanath neighborhood, and furthermore, since the mid-1980s, it has has been associated with the three great Gelugpa monasteries (collectively referred to as 'Sendregasum') that were reestablished in South India. I was told that the founder lama effectively offered his Bodhanath monastery to the Dalai Lama, and thus, every five years they receive an abbot-teacher (*mkhan-po*) from one of the Sendregasum (Sera (*Se-ra*); Drepung (*'Bras-spungs*); Ganden (*Dga-ldan*)). This abbot instructs the monks until his tenure is finished, at which point he is replaced by another teacher sent up from South India. In 1994, according to the middle-aged monk I spoke with, there were approximately seventy monks in residence there; 'unlike the other gompas [of Bodhanath], most of our monks are Tibetan, with only a few from the border areas [of Nepal].'

The 'Mongolian gompa' has become *the* 'Gelugpa gompa' around the Chorten as it has grown in size and in number of monks since the mid to late 1980s. This is a general trend for most of the monasteries in Bodhanath. For example, the second monastery built near Jarungkhashor was established in the mid-1960s by Dabzang (Zla-bzang) Rinpoche, a Karma Kagyu tulku who built yet another gompa, at a nearby site, twenty years later, when the old gompa was simply too small to house all the monks. Dabzang Rinpoche passed away in 1991, and one of his monks told me that they were waiting for his *yang-srid* (rebirth) to be found. Although I knew several older expatriate Buddhists who saw the late Dabzang Rinpoche as one of their teachers, the monk told me that Rinpoche had 'not so many Inji [Western] disciples, but many in Hong Kong.'

Ninety monks were said to be in residence, and of that number, I was told that ten to twelve were originally from Tibet. Many of the other monks came from Nyeshang, Dolpo, Nubri, Shorung and Lo (northern areas of Nepal that border Tibet).[12] Still others were Tamang and Gurungs from the lower hills of Nepal.

Dabzang Rinpoche's new monastery, when not referred to in just those terms by Tibetans who live near it, is also called 'Dil-yag gompa' (short for *Dil-yag e-wam dpal-ri bkra-shis mi-'gyur rdo-rje rgyal-mtshan gling*), which itself refers back to Rinpoche's seat at the original Dil-yag gompa in Kham (eastern Tibet). Like all of the monasteries in Bodhanath, Dabzang Rinpoche's gompa itself is made up of a group of buildings, all arranged around the central temple (*lha-khang*) that doubles as the central assembly hall (*tshogs-khang* or *'dus-khang*); this is always the most prominent building in any monastery complex. The lha khang building varies in size depending on the monastery, with the ground floor (often with very high ceilings to permit the placement of large sacred statuary) serving as the assembly hall and temple proper. The floors above the lha khang are the private living chambers for the monastery's founder and most prominent tulku(s). It is in the semi-public rooms of these apartments that lamas will receive visitors and disciples, and in addition teach or carry out smaller-scale rituals. In many of Bodhanath's larger monasteries, like Dabzang Rinpoche's, there is a central courtyard in front of the main lha khang, and several of them have built one-or two-story 'wings' off of this area to house the monastic population. Some monasteries use rooms in the monks' quarters as classrooms for both study and ritual/musical practice, others appear to utilize parts of the lha khang itself; when weather permits, which is quite often, outdoor areas in courtyards or on the flat lower roofs of the monks' dwellings become the classrooms.

Dabzang Rinpoche's monastery is unusual in that it owns and manages a two-story hotel right next door to its new location. When I first stayed at the Lotus Guest House in the spring of 1991, it was new, spotless and full of Western Buddhists nearly every night. The builders had clearly anticipated a need, for up through the mid-1980s there had only been two other 'hotels' to accommodate Western travelers in the vicinity of the Chorten, and both of them were small, a bit shabby, and located on the main road. Several European travelers that I met in 1991 told me how happy they were to find lodging at 'the Lotus' after having initially stayed in Thamel with all of the tourists; one woman remarked to me how 'lovely' it was to be woken up each morning by the blare of monastic trumpets and long horns from the nearby monasteries. But the Lotus Guest House had only fifteen to twenty rooms, so during the spring and fall seasons especially, when certain lamas give public teachings, it was filled up well in advance. Indeed, some of its guests would stay in their rooms for a month or more, attending a seminar for several weeks, studying and meditating in their rooms, and visiting local teachers.

While Dilyag gompa might seem an anomaly in that it receives revenue from the Lotus Guest House, it appears that other of Bodhanath's monasteries are also involved in various business ventures, though it is difficult to know the specifics of these affiliations as much of this information is not for public know-

ledge.[13] On two or three occasions I even heard rumors from Western Buddhist expatriates about 'drug money' being given to some of Bodhanath's monasteries by less than savory jindaks, variously described as Tibetans or Nepalese or Hong Kong Chinese. But whether baseless or grounded in some fact, the accusation is what provoked my interest. To what end, and amidst what already-in-place discourses does rumor circulate? What sorts of subject positions does it demand of those who speak it?

One afternoon in late 1993 I had an informal conversation with an expatriate Buddhist friend who suggested to me, as we parted, that the economies driving the monastery boom in Bodhanath might not be as simple as either the recruitment of powerful jindaks or the construction of a well-run guest house that funnels its profits to the gompa (or jindak) that financed it. Specifically, he exhorted me to 'do some research' on the various black market schemes that indirectly made money for Tibetan gompas, not because he was necessarily opposed to such ventures, but rather because he felt that the majority of Western Buddhists were far too naïve about the 'realities' of high-finance monastic economies. While he positioned himself as a world-weary yogin, with eyes wide open (and myself, by implication, as the budding neophyte journalist in search of a big scoop), a French woman with whom I brought it up told me that 'such stories are damaging to the Dharma,' thus leaving me on the lowest of moral ground. My expatriate friend's nonchalant rumor, and his hopes that I might take up investigating its 'truth,' had again brought up the unsettling issue of money and purity, profit and charity in the field of spiritual economy.

Charles Keyes notes the existence of both asceticism and what might now be read as 'worldly' behavior (in particular the ownership of significant property) within the long history of Buddhist monasticism.[14] He maintains, that contemporary controversies surrounding 'worldly monks' in Thailand 'reflect[s] a deep uncertainty about what constitutes Buddhist moral authority in a society that has become intensely modern' (n.d.: 3). It is the habitual practices and attitudes of modernity, such as a self-consciousness with regard to what once went without saying (and is now marked as 'tradition'), that are part and parcel of this uncertainty and critical reflection. Even as this perception seems accurate with regard to some contemporary Tibetan critiques of monastic behavior (as discussed in the following chapter), it is also partly vitiated by the rather different moral regimes that undergird Tibet's Vajrayana Buddhism. And in some discussions I had with Western students of Buddhism, there is yet another logic at work, one informed both by a modernist reading of 'religion' and by the historical discourse of Orientalism.

It is clear that gompas engaging in, or directly benefiting from, financial investments and speculation is 'traditional' with regards to Tibetan history. Large monasteries in pre-1950 Tibet were economic powerhouses that conducted trade, as well as exerted control over agricultural and pastoral land, as a means of supporting themselves. While no Tibetan monks in Bodhanath seemed interested (most claimed complete ignorance) in discussing monastery finances on a large scale with me, monks at nearly every monastery I visited did explain that

they at least partially supported themselves by performing rituals for lay patrons.[15] Some monasteries, like Shechen, have also set up sponsorship programs for their monks, so that (primarily Western) jindaks' donations are then used to provide food, clothing and medical treatment to gompa residents. Finally, many monks receive financial assistance from their families, if they are fortunate enough to come from a family that can economically support them. Thus, while contemporary monasteries do attempt to provide for their residents, and often do take on 'hardship cases' such as orphaned children, Tibetan monastic institutions have *never* provided for the bulk of their residents' needs, as Lopez explains with regard to pre-1950 Tibet:

> Tibetan monks were not fully supported by the monasteries, receiving only a small ration of tea and roasted barley for their subsistence; they had to rely on their families or their own earnings (from trade or performing rituals) for anything more. Monks did not go on begging rounds, like their counterparts in Southeast Asia, but engaged in a wide range of occupations. It is therefore inaccurate to imagine that all Tibetan monks spent their days in meditation or in debating sophisticated points of doctrine; only a small percentage were thus occupied. Furthermore, the majority of the occupants of Tibetan monasteries remained as novices throughout their lives, not going on to take the vows of a fully ordained monk (*dge-slong*; bhiksu).
>
> (1997: 20)

In exile there are far fewer monks in proportion to the population of lay Tibetans than there once were, and the monasteries in Nepal are much smaller than most of their predecessors in Tibet. While monks in the great Gelugpa monasteries re-established in South India took to working agricultural fields in order to support their monastic communities, the monks of Bodhanath's gompas do not till or even directly own land. Still, it appears that the majority of all monks in India and Nepal are now 'engaged in the scholastic curriculum at some level' to a degree never found in pre-diaspora Tibet (Lopez 1995: 275). In addition, as will be examined further in the very next chapter, many of the monks in Bodhanath enter the gompas as children and leave in their late teens or early twenties.

Bringing Buddhism to the West: Kopan monastery as the center of an international 'mandala'[16]

In 1970, when Kopan monastery was established on a hill an hour's walk from the Chorten, there were no guesthouses anywhere in the area. Kopan was built by Thubten Yeshe, a Gelugpa lama, and his main disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, as both a monastery for Tibetan Buddhist monks (and later, nuns) and as a center for teaching Western people about the Dharma. A 1993 pamphlet states that:

> Kopan monastery was founded by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 1970 in response to the strong need for spiritual guidance and studies expressed by Westerners. It is a Center of Buddhist teachings in the Mahayana tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Since its inception many thousands of people from all over the world have been introduced to the Buddhist teachings at Kopan, attending meditation courses, doing retreat, or simply enjoying the quiet and peaceful surroundings, and the excellent library at the monastery.
>
> Kopan also incorporates a monastery for 140 [now more than 200] monks of varied ethnical [sic] background such as Tibetans, Sherpas, etc. These monks are educated in the traditional Buddhist subjects as well as learning modern subjects such as English, math, science, etc. Many of them later go as translators to Dharma Centers in the West.[17]

Despite its relative distance from the Chorten at Bodhanath, Kopan is one of the most popular destinations for Western travelers interested in Buddhism. Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche traveled and taught extensively in the West, establishing the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) in 1975, which now has over eighty centers[18] throughout the world; Kopan is the 'mother-monastery' of this international organization. Following Lama Yeshe's death in 1984, Zopa Rinpoche has continued their work, and recognized his teacher's rebirth in 1986 in Spain. Lama Yeshe was reborn as Ösel Hita Torres, the son of Spanish Buddhists who were his disciples. Now known as Lama Ösel, he visits Kopan annually, but apparently spends most of his time studying at Sera monastery in South India.

Kopan has offered its annual one-month meditation course since at least 1980, and in November 1993 there were close to 250 people who attended.[19] There are also shorter meditation courses, usually lasting from a week to ten days, that are held almost monthly in the fall and spring, and in addition, Kopan allows Western visitors to stay at the monastery even when these events are not being held, providing accommodation in single and double rooms. But the monastery is also home to approximately 200 monks, many of whom are Sherpas (Lama Zopa Rinpoche was born in Nepal's Khumbu region), and below the main lha khang and monks' quarters a 'nunnery' was being completed at the bottom of the hill in 1993–1994.

Twenty-five nuns already lived at Kopan in 1989 when the project was instigated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, according to a flyer I received. Printed with the ani-gompa's name, Khachoe Ghakhil Ling Nunnery, at the top of it, this four-page English newsletter declares 'We thank all benefactors for their support in making the nunnery possible,' and then intersperses an account of its building (largely by the nuns' own labor it seems) with photographs of its progression. The final page, entitled 'We Still Need Your Support,' details the ways in which contributors can help pay for finishing the nunnery's construction, provide food money for the resident nuns, or sponsor an individual nun. The newsletter predicted at the time that 'the nunnery is expected to have around 100 nuns in a

few years time. It is essential to think about their needs now, and make sure they will be taken care of in the future.' By 2000, the nunnery had over 200 nuns, and was hard pressed to provide rooms for all who wanted to enter.

Appealing to Western support is taken for granted by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition because it is an organization that is largely run by Western Buddhists. Indeed, Kopan is the only monastery in Nepal in which *Western* monks and nuns regularly function as Buddhist teachers to other Westerners, in addition to the learned Tibetan lamas and geshes (*dge-bshes*) who are the main instructors in Kopan's annual meditation course. The Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Center (HBMC, formerly the Himalayan Yogic Institute), an FPMT branch in a more urban part of Kathmandu, is closely affiliated with Kopan. HBMC offers one-day weekend classes taught by Tibetan monks, Western monastic and lay teachers, on various aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, alternative healing systems and other topics. FPMT also has 'institutes' in both Dharamsala ('Tushita') and in Bodh Gaya ('The Root Institute for Wisdom Culture'), in addition to the Maitri Leprosy Centre, established in Bodh Gaya in 1989 and supported entirely through donations (see figure 5).

As might be inferred from all this activity, FPMT has a large number of very committed members worldwide, with centers in Europe, North America, Latin America and Southeast Asia. As is the case with other 'sanghas' of foreign disciples surrounding Tibetan teachers mentioned below, senior students often undertake enormous responsibility in the day-to-day maintenance of their centers, and in facilitating the master's teaching and ritual activity internationally.

Western' Dharma students are not the only ones who come to Kopan, and indeed there are FPMT centers in Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia. According to Daniel, an Australian man who attended the 1993 Kopan 'course,' the month-long event culminated with participants making the traditional offering of long life prayers and monetary donations to Lama Zopa Rinpoche at the end of his teachings. The offering of long life prayers, requests for the teacher to long remain in the world (*brtan-bzhugs*), and presentation of donations to the teacher are commonly performed after a lama has taught or performed ritual empowerments. This also occurred at the close of Chökyi Nyima and Thrangu Rinpoches' seminars, though in these latter cases the *amount* of donation by individuals was not publicly announced. It is commonly announced, however, in the context of large-scale *ritual* performances, in which different jindak may take responsibility for different days of the performance, during which they may provide money to feed monks and other participants, and/or present individual offerings of money to all ritual participants (Bentor 1996: 346). Daniel and a co-participant agreed that in the amount of offerings proffered, the Asian patrons 'put the Western jindaks to shame:'

> Each of the sixty-four [FPMT] centers worldwide gave a donation during the long life puja [ritual worship-offering] held for [Zopa Rinpoche]. The big sponsors' names and the donation [amount] they gave were read off at that time … The biggest sponsors were [from] Taiwan, Singapore and

> Hong Kong and some of the largest amounts were hundreds of thousands of rupees [i.e. several thousand US dollars at the time]. None of the names on the big money list were Westerners, though some of these big sponsors were [dharma] centers. Still, many were individuals.

Like some of my other Western Buddhist friends in Nepal, Daniel was taken aback the first time he heard donors' names read along with the amounts they had given, in front of the assembled sangha; it seemed showy, 'competitive,' and thus out of place. What exactly is that 'place' where something called Buddhism belongs? How might we understand the sign of money as both a prominent feature and yet also a transgressive presence in a Buddhist landscape as imagined by Westerners? Other lay Asian Buddhists, especially Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Singapore Chinese, are seen by most Western Buddhists, and by most Tibetan teachers I spoke with as well, as occupying a position more nearly aligned with that of lay Tibetans in this tableau. As might be recalled, it is often Asian jindaks who are credited with donating much of the money that now flows into Bodhanath's monasteries, while 'most Western people don't really give much at all.' At the same time, several Western Buddhists opined that many Chinese Buddhists expect very *immediate* rewards for their generous offerings: special ritual empowerments from Tibetan lamas, more attention from them, and material blessings in the form of consecrated substances and amulets. As I mention in a following chapter, it is here that Western Buddhists again locate their difference from lay Tibetans and more 'traditional' Chinese Buddhists.

My conversation with Daniel had continued along these lines; we questioned how money figured in the propagation of Buddhism, but also the converse: that *of course* the lamas' teaching, building and humanitarian activity had to be enabled by funds. He noted that with all of Zopa Rinpoche's work, there is clearly a need for donations, what with the various big projects that are envisioned by the FPMT such as the new four-story lhak hang to be built at Kopan where the old hall now stands. It is important to note here that the financial concerns of each individual center is largely its own responsibility, though each center worldwide ideally contributes to Kopan and, presumably, their organization-wide projects. According to the FPMT magazine *Mandala*, a 'fund-raising event in Singapore [was] attended by 5,500 people' on October 26, 1997, in order 'to raise money towards the S$5.5 million needed to construct our new center.' According to the report, nearly S$700,00 (US$441,000) was raised in the event; 'ticket sales increased dramatically after stories about Lama Ösel [the Spanish-born tulku of Lama Yeshe] appeared in the local papers … Several thousand people came to receive his blessing in the afternoon before the dinner.' Daniel claimed that the most expensive work under FPMT development is the 'Maitreya Project,' which entails raising a 170-foot-tall statue of the Buddha-to-come (*Byams-pa*) at Bodh Gaya. Yet he wondered whether the project *should* go ahead, telling me that he found it a 'bit vulgar' that such an immense golden statue would be built on the plains of Bihar (India's poorest state).

Kopan remains the single most important site in Nepal for educating

Westerners about Buddhism through formal teaching, meditation courses and accommodating students who want to undertake retreat. It has a very large monastic population that has the opportunity to learn 'modern subjects,' in addition to a Buddhist curriculum, but for the most part the local monks have minimal interaction with Western Buddhist students. As the Kopan pamphlet 'Information for Visitors' makes clear, 'All the monks at Kopan are engaged in study or busy with their jobs. Please do not distract them from their study or work by chatting to them unnecessarily.' Unlike most of the other monasteries of Bodhanath, Kopan is not the re-construction of a gompa that existed previously in Tibet. Kopan emphatically exists as the hub of an *international* organization that aims primarily to bring Buddhism to the West, both through its wide network of affiliated centers, and through its large publishing house, Wisdom Publications, based in London and Boston. Lama Zopa Rinpoche directs the placement of a growing staff of Tibetan and Western Buddhist monastics to teach in FPMT centers in the West, and he himself is nearly always traveling.

With their highly developed website (http://www.fpmt.org), the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition has entered a new level of organization and outreach that their founder Lama Yeshe would no doubt be pleased with. Indeed, the initial pages found under the heading 'The Organization' are specifically concerned to lay out 'Lama Yeshe's Vision' and to provide an edited sampling of his remarks and advice to the centers that have come into existence following his and Zopa Rinpoche's direction:

> We know that people are dissatisfied with worldly life, with the education system and everything else; it is in the nature of dualistic minds to be dissatisfied. So what we are trying to do is to help people discover their own totality and thus perfect satisfaction. Now, the way we have evolved is not through you or me having said we want to do these things but through a natural process of development. Our organization has grown naturally, organically. It is not 'Lama Yeshe wanted to do it'; I've never said that I want centers all over the world. Rather, I came into contact with students, who then wanted to do something – expressed the wish to share their experience with others – and put together groups in various countries to share and grow with others.[20]

Bringing Westerners to Buddhism: meeting the lama at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling

Kopan is set on a hill several kilometers from the Chorten itself, and in some ways this speaks to its status apart from the other monasteries that lie much closer together in an area surrounding Jarungkhashor. One of the first of these gompa, and the other most important monastery in the Bodhanath area for Western Dharma students, is Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling ('Garden of Study and Practice of the Kagyu and Nyingma'). This monastery, which takes its name from the fact that it maintains doctrines and practices from both the Kagyu and

Nyingma traditions, was established by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche in the early 1970s.[21] Rinpoche had been in Nepal for over a decade at that time, having stayed previously in Sikkim, where he had been both disciple and guru, as well as trusted advisor, to the Sixteenth Karmapa.

In 1984, when I first visited Bodhanath, this monastery dominated all of the surrounding buildings and fields, not only because of its size, but also because of its bright white-washed facade and walls topped with dark orange trim. By 1994, several other monasteries, many of them built by lamas of the Kagyu and Nyingma sects, had been built nearby Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling, causing a concentration of temples and monastic dwellings in close proximity, and unlike anywhere else in the world. Jean-Paul, a translator of Tibetan texts and expatriate in Kathmandu since the early 1970s, told me that Tulku Urgyen's construction of Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling in 1974

> may have been when the real boom [in monastery building] began. Rinpoche received a huge donation from [an American jindak], and when he built his gompa it kind of upped the ante – it made all the Tibetan lamas realize that this [building on a grand scale] was possible.

Previous to the construction of this gompa, all of the structures around Bodhanath, such as the aforementioned 'Mongolian' monastery and Dabzang Rinpoche's first building, even the monastery built by Tarig (Lta-rig) Rinpoche, a Ngor Sakya tulku, in 1969, were relatively small. Helffer (1993: 117) mentions that Tarig Rinpoche added to his monastery in 1970, but even so it probably occupies less than half of the space covered by Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling's central hall, monastic dwellings and open courtyard areas. Fürer-Haimendorf (1989: 104–105) notes that it was the Chini Lama's initial donation of land that allowed both Dabzang and Tarig Rinpoches to construct their gompas, and it is probable that he also played a role in granting or selling land to Tulku Urgyen for construction of his monastery, as the Chini Lama and his family have been the principal landholders in the area for generations.

I mention here just two aspects of Tulku Urgyen's work in Nepal: his extensive building projects and the concomitant visibility they have brought to Tibetan Buddhism in the Kathmandu Valley, and, even more importantly, his son Tulku Chökyi Nyima's work in establishing Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling as the most accessible center for the study and practice of Buddhism by Westerners in addition to Kopan.[22] Like Kopan and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche has committed the greater part of his life to the instruction of non-Tibetans in Buddhism. He began giving an annual seminar, typically held for two weeks in October or November, at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling in 1981; in 1993 (and when I counted again in 2000) there were nearly two hundred attendees. In addition, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche frequently teaches in a much less formal way, receiving a seemingly endless number of visitors to his apartments in the upper stories of the monastery above the central assembly hall.[23] For the last decade or more, Rinpoche has taught for about two hours to interested Westerners,

Nepalese and occasional Tibetans on most Saturday mornings in the fall and spring. Unlike Kopan, Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling was not the center of a world-wide organization like the FPMT; unlike many of his contemporaries in Bodhanath who also have Western disciples, including Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Thrangu Rinpoche, and even the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche only began to travel more widely outside of Asia in the mid to late 1990s.

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche has established a reputation as perhaps the most accessible Tibetan lama in Kathmandu for Westerners interested in instruction; he speaks enough English to communicate with the many foreigners who arrive to see him and when he teaches at length, almost always has an excellent translator with him. I have heard Rinpoche say several times that he has a 'connection,' a karmic link with teaching Western people. One day in the late summer of 1993 I recall watching as Rinpoche finished up his two hours of teaching to a small group of us and, somewhat uncharacteristically, began to ask us questions: was his teaching of any benefit? did we remember and put into practice what he was saying? He then spoke about his own desires to undertake retreat and be less involved in the busy world, and the conflicting pull of teaching obligations and being available to people.

Like Lama Zopa, he has published several books (most of them transcriptions of his oral teaching) and has also established a publishing house (Rangjung Yeshe Press) that is effectively managed by several of his and Tulku Urgyen's oldest European and American disciples. Since 1994 Rinpoche has traveled to Europe once each year, where he has established a teaching and retreat center in Denmark; he has set up a similar center for his numerous American students in northern California. Nevertheless, Tulku Chökyi Nyima seems to bring most students to himself, and has found himself in the role of lama to Westerners, East and Southeast Asians, and an increasing number of Nepalis in Kathmandu since the mid-1980s.

While Kopan provides more structured courses in meditation for Westerners, often taught by Western monks or nuns who are students of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, it is frequently to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche that expatriate Buddhists send visitors and friends who want to 'meet a Buddhist lama' and hear Buddhist teachings. As mentioned earlier, while Zopa Rinpoche himself is rarely in Kathmandu, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche teaches in the assembly hall of his monastery nearly every Saturday morning, most often with a translator assisting.

As with the other Tibetan tulkus mentioned here, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche functions as a sign of 'Tibetan Buddhism' for many foreigners who come to meet him. Indeed, because of his very accessibility to both serious students of Buddhism and especially Western travelers intrigued by the notion of meeting a 'Tibetan lama' in a Tibetan monastery, Rinpoche's presence *qua* sign is often overdetermined by the imaginative landscape that some travelers expect a Tibetan lama to inhabit.

One friend whom I sent to see Rinpoche in 1987 had expressed interest in meeting a Tibetan master and asking him about Buddhism. Her initial excite-

ment was replaced by disappointment when she had to meet him along with some fifteen other people. Later, when she did get a chance to talk with him one-on-one 'about Buddhism,' he asked her how long she was staying in town – and could she please read a book or two that he recommended and then come back and talk to him again? Instead of a fulfilling (enlightening?) conversation as per her expectations, she got 'homework.'[24] During the Saturday morning sessions with Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche in 1993 and 1994, when groups of twenty to fifty Europeans, Americans, Canadians, Australians, Israelis, Chinese and others might fill Rinpoche's beautiful receiving room on the third floor of the main monastery building, some visitors were nonplussed to find the lama pausing for a moment in the question and answer period to take a call on a mobile phone. After answering his phone one morning and then speaking in highly honorific Tibetan that must have been unintelligible to most of those gathered, he suddenly looked out at the assembled group of students, and asked in English, 'What time is it now – in Berkeley?'

The first time something like this transpired, I found myself pondering why such an event should give me pause, but of course it was the seeming incongruities: Rinpoche seated on a silken platform with a canopied banner over his head, gilded antique Tibetan images in the large cases to his right, carpets and parquet flooring glided over by barefoot attendant monks – in short the very epitome of the lama in his 'natural' (Tibetan, spiritual, ancient) environment – and then the sleek little phone and the powerful reminder of intrusive modernity. And it did feel invasive, as if the separate special place I had just entered was being dis-enchanted. Sometimes I wonder if this is precisely the effect that Rinpoche intended, an interruption of expectations and reifications that surround 'Tibet' and 'Buddhism.'

* * *

For a few of my acquaintances, two of whom were Western practitioners of Zen, it was the seemingly luxurious apartments of several Tibetan teachers that caused comment. They wondered how the lamas could 'live like that' after seeing the poverty outside their monastery gates. Here then was another supposed incongruity, though this time not based on the intrusiveness of modernity as it treads upon 'tradition,' but rather the stink of mammon amidst what 'should be' a hermetically sealed chamber (called 'spirituality') redolent with perfumed lotuses. The presence of 'wealth' in the tulkus' chambers, as well as in the gilded images within monastery lha khangs, and indeed the very exchange of wealth – especially from Nepalese and Tibetans who might be read as 'already poor' to their venerable priests – contradict the expected image of asceticism and gross renunciation some associate with Buddhism. Certainly there is ample precedent in all Buddhist societies for taking a dim view of the ordained Sangha's over-involvement (or over-zealous interest) in matters of the world. But does this mean that my acquaintances' criticism of the wealth of most gompas and of tulkus in particular is identical with the complaints registered by some of

my older Tibetan friends, warning me that ‘these days, too many lamas care only about money’?

Whereas some Westerners (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) found the obvious presence of money disturbing in a tradition that they read as ‘anti-materialistic,’ i.e. purely spiritual, most Tibetans did not dichotomize economics and religion in this way. And certainly, the mere presence of wealth (whether in a monastery lha khang or in the receiving room of a lama) never seemed to be taken as an indicator of a lama’s qualities by my Tibetan interlocutors. For some of my Western interlocutors, not only should Dharma (religion) and money not mix (something many of my Tibetan informants could agree with only in theory), but by foregrounding wealth and finances in a ‘religious’ sphere the sanctity of what they imagine as ‘traditional’ is disturbed as well. In complex ways, Western Buddhists seek to position themselves amidst a pure Buddhism as it is defined by their teachers and by scriptural authority. Yet at the same time, pre-conceived ideas about ‘Buddhist tradition’ and a corrosive modernity (Sheeran 1997) intrude and complicate what can pass for authoritative.

When Thrangu, Chökyi Nyima and Zopa Rinpoches teach their annual seminars, their senior Western disciples organize the events, arrange for publicity (if any), register the participants, and decide on and collect fees for the series of teachings. In 1993, I spoke with several organizers of the seminars as well as with the people who sat at the entrance to the events in order to collect money from participants. Nearly every Western Buddhist involved in the seminars told me that while Tibetans give freely to their lamas in a ritual setting, and will often sacrifice to make an offering, it can be difficult to solicit Western Buddhists. Most do give donations to their teachers, according to their own desires and based on their particular financial status. The lamas, for their part, never ask for donations to be made, and in some cases remind their students that ‘real devotion’ to the Dharma and ‘actually practicing’ are the best offering to make. Nevertheless, as one Canadian woman working behind the desk at a 1993 seminar given by her Tibetan teacher told me:

> You would not believe how little people will give [if you leave the amount up to them], they argue over NRs. 1,500 [thirty dollars] for a ten-day course … [They say] ‘the Dharma is free, you shouldn’t be charging people to get in here to receive teachings.’ These are often the same people who are wearing lapis lazuli prayer beads or who will drop hundreds of dollars for a statue to take home.

Tradition is invoked on both sides of the counter, by those who maintain that it is wrong to ‘sell’ the teachings (and that this is a contemporary aberration which *never* occurred previously) to those who argue that making donation to the teacher by lay people is dana, the oldest of Buddhist traditions. The rub is, of course, that ‘some people’ do not seem to take this tradition of dana to heart, and thus ‘have to’ be presented with a set fee. A further argument invokes norms of Tantric discipleship, noting that such famous Tibetan masters as Marpa and

Milarepa paid gold and submitted themselves to excruciating trials all to prove their devotion to their teachers and their longing for instruction. When the Dalai Lama taught and bestowed the Kalachakra initiation over a week-long period in Los Angeles in 1989, the $150 fee was, His Holiness explained, to defer the costs of his monastic entourage's travel, the renting of the Santa Monica auditorium and other 'overhead' costs. It is wrong, he said, to profit from the Dharma. But in 1993, an American woman told me she heard that the Dalai Lama was going to start asking much higher fees when he teaches in the West. The reason, she explained, is that 'we have no devotion.' And according to her, some people had told the Dalai Lama that Americans only value something if you make them *pay* a lot for it.

Patrons in an internationalized monastic economy

Thrangu Tashi Choling was established by the Karma Kagyu tulku Thrangu Rinpoche in 1976; it is located just a hundred yards or so from the base of the Chorten, which it faces, and its back is a few hundred yards from the front gate of Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling. Thrangu Rinpoche is the chief abbot (*mkhan-chen*) of the Karma Shri Nalanda Institute at Rumtek monastery in Sikkim, the seat of his sectarian tradition's foremost spiritual authority, the Gyalwang Karmapa. Thrangu Rinpoche travels frequently to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Canada, Europe and the United States, and in the early 1990s began an annual series of teaching seminars for Western Buddhists at his monastery in Bodhanath.[25]

Since the late 1980s Thrangu Rinpoche has taught in the West to a greater degree and has attracted more Western students. Like Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso, the founder of Bodhanath's Marpa Institute for Translation, Thrangu Rinpoche has developed a following among students of the late Trungpa Tulku, who established the largest Tibetan Buddhist organization (Vajradhatu) in the United States beginning in the 1970s. An enormously charismatic and often controversial teacher who drew especially from the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, Trungpa Rinpoche left behind an international network of students and meditation centers, in addition to a vacuum in spiritual leadership, when he died in 1987. Thrangu Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso are conversely regarded as highly 'traditional' teachers and as scholars, but both have given teachings to Trungpa Rinpoche's students in the United States. Now both lamas are drawing these same students to Bodhanath, where they might attend the Thrangu seminar or 'take teachings' from Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso when he is in residence.

In mid-September of 1993 I met an American couple, Jean and Tony, who had recently returned to Kathmandu after a four-year hiatus. They had first come in the late 1980s and had stayed for two years at that time, studying with Thrangu Rinpoche in particular. Originally they were both students of Trungpa Rinpoche, but they had some mixed feelings about their place in the Vajradhatu organization since his death. They did one of the summer 'seminary' events (courses in intensive study and practice that Trungpa Rinpoche set up, which

had become an obligatory *rite de passage* among his Buddhist disciples) at the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center in Colorado, and heard Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso teach there. Jean told me that they were both ‘overwhelmed’ by what they heard him teach, as well as by his presence.

She had also told me right from the outset of our meeting that she felt like she needed to study Tibetan language so that she could ‘understand the lamas directly when they teach.’ So they returned to Nepal with their children, in search of jobs (in ‘development’ and education they hoped), and visas that would allow them to stay. Out of eight Western students in the Tibetan class she had begun in Kathmandu, ‘only two or three of us are Buddhist.’ She wondered aloud to me, ‘why would anyone want to study Tibetan if they are not Buddhists?’ The obvious and unself-conscious implication here is that Tibet *is* Buddhism, and indeed, without Buddhism, Tibet is largely irrelevant. As I was later to discover, many of the non-Buddhist students in the Tibetan language class were in fact missionaries, who had equally ‘religious’ motives for studying, albeit the conversions they sought were not their own.[26]

Unfortunately, Jean, and Tony to an even greater degree, perceived Bodhanath as ‘overcrowded,’ and found many unpleasant changes had taken place in their four-year absence. ‘The lamas don’t have much time,’ Tony told me. He noted that when they had lived here before, he would often stop by to see X Rinpoche, have tea with him, or even invite him to their home. Now, Tony said, ‘the lamas have to keep giving teachings and setting up new centers abroad, and they need money to do this.’ When I mentioned that trips abroad can also raise funds for a teacher, he remarked that it had become a ‘vicious circle.’ What appears to be unexamined in this nostalgia is the way in which our very presence has created the social conditions that we now bemoan, an old and familiar tale to imperialists and modern travelers alike.

Thrangu Rinpoche, besides being the chief abbot for the Karma Kagyupa main monastery of Rumtek, and the abbot of his own monastery in Bodhanath, is also the abbot of Gampo Abbey, a monastic center in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, initially started by Trungpa Rinpoche and currently directed by the latter’s student, Pema Chödron, a Western Buddhist nun and teacher in her own right.[27] Thrangu Rinpoche has also, like Lama Zopa Rinpoche, sought to provide for Tibetan and Nepalese women who wish to become nuns (*ani*), and built a Tibetan gompa for nuns of the Karma Kagyu sect in Swayambhunath. He has appealed directly to Western Buddhists and ‘friends,’ asking them to financially support an ani gompa where women could finally receive a complete religious education, something denied to them in old Tibet.[28]

Pawo (Dpa’-bo) Rinpoche, a senior tulku also in the Karma Kagyu tradition, passed away in France in 1990. Rinpoche had been living and teaching in the Dordogne for nine years, and built his monastery Nenang Phuntsok Chöling (*Gnas-nang phun-tshogs chos-gling*) in Bodhanath, less than a hundred yards to the northwest of Tulku Urgyen’s monastery, in 1985. When I visited the gompa in 1994, there were very few monks in residence; I was told that there were ten of them in total: half from Nye-shang (Nepali: Manang) and Solu-Khumbu, and

half from Tibet. The two monks that I spoke with told me that Rinpoche's students in France had of course been important jindaks for the building of the monastery. But now that Rinpoche had passed away and his rebirth had yet to be identified, it was very difficult for them to finish building, or even keep up, the gompa. Unlike some of the other lamas in Bodhanath, Pawo Rinpoche had apparently not traveled in Southeast Asia or in Hong Kong and Taiwan; while his monks in Bodhanath were grateful for the Western donations that they did receive, their situation makes very clear the difficulties facing Tibetan monastic institutions in exile, when patronage is not forthcoming.

The situation of Pawo Rinpoche's gompa stands in contrast to Kopan and Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling, both well supported by foreign jindaks, as well as another much smaller monastery not far from the Chorten itself. I eventually sought out this monastery after having met its resident lama, Gyaltsen Rinpoche, quite by chance. All but one of his twenty-two monks (in 1994) were Tibetan, and recent arrivals at that. Rinpoche told me that he had 'imported' them from mostly rural southwestern Tibet; they were smuggled out for a fee of 5,000–10,000 rupees each, and given an education in Buddhism and some 'modern' subjects as well. Rinpoche also noted that these boys from Tibet made better monks because they were not as likely to be distracted – by family ties, and gifts from family members of money, fancy clothes, even motorcycles – like some of the Tibetan-exile monks who had relatives living close by. Gyaltsen Rinpoche's comments indicate that one way out of the deleterious effects of Bodhanath's fast-paced life on impressionable monks (the critique of monks, and monasteries themselves, is the central subject of the next chapter) is to find monks who have few ties to the local community, and in addition, are truly willing to study and practice hard. Importantly, Rinpoche said that by bringing these boys to Nepal he is allowing them access to Tibetan and Buddhist culture, as well as more modern developments that are unavailable in the Tibetan homeland. Later in our discussion, his comments were even further linked to a national discourse that centered on His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the danger inherent in accepting patronage from suspect donors.

Rinpoche told me that from his travels in Europe and North America, it seemed that 'poor' Americans, or at least not the truly 'rich,' are most interested in the Dharma. The reason for this, he proposed, was that these people have suffered and are looking for a way out of suffering. As we talked about religious sponsors, and his opinion that Western people rarely give a tremendous amount of money to support religious activity like building gompas or elaborate ritual events, he juxtaposed this with some Taiwanese patrons. Rinpoche maintained that one Taiwanese patron had given $300,000 to build a house for a very high-ranking Tibetan lama in the Bodhanath area. Yet another group of Taiwanese had been the main sponsors for a very important series of ritual empowerments that had just been conducted in Bodhanath. These particular jindak had provoked a great deal of talk among Tibetans around the Chorten after they invited monks from various monasteries to come and recite prayers with a high lama at the Chorten itself. Monks were offered NRs. 550 each at the close of the

ceremony, a very large amount, and many were presented with attractive cloth monks' bags, printed in Thailand for the occasion. The gossip about this situation may have begun because of the scale and visibility of the jindak's patronage, but it provoked disapproval among some Tibetans I spoke with because of the nationality of the patrons.

Rinpoche himself was not critical of their largesse, and in fact mentioned that Taiwanese and other Chinese (i.e. from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong) jindaks are quite 'like Tibetans' in that they have been 'Buddhist for a very long time' and also frequently request teachers to come and give empowerments. But he then cautioned me that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had mentioned that Tibetans should not accept money or other patronage from Taiwanese, and that he himself felt that Tibetans must respect this wish as His Holiness had provided so much for them in exile. Throughout 1993 and 1994, Taiwan figured prominently in many of the conversations that I had with Tibetans about Bodhanath lamas and monastery building. My discussion here barely scratches the surface of the history of the contentious relationship between Tibetans and Taiwan that has its roots in the founding philosophy of the Guomindang, and therefore also the republican (and neo-imperial) vision of Sun Yat-sen. Several Tibetans told me that the 'difficulties' with Taiwan and concern about its influence had actually peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But many continued to harbor suspicions about the loyalties of the Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup, implicated in much of the 'Taiwan connection' and seen as an apologist for nationalist China.

For some Tibetans, both lay and monastic, the 'Taiwan issue' (as one of my English-speaking friends referred to it) is overblown and to be shrugged off, but other Tibetans used it almost as a litmus test of fealty to the Dalai Lama, and to the Tibetan nation in general, as well as a way of disparaging fellow Tibetans. Thus, in its most extreme form, Tibetans who worked in Taiwan, Tibetans who received aid to send their children to school there, even some lamas who went to Taiwan to teach, were said to care 'only about money.' It was implied, and sometimes stated outright, that what such people with Taiwan connections do *not* care about is Tibetan sovereignty and the struggle to regain an independent homeland.

According to many lay Tibetans I spoke with about this issue, His Holiness had told Tibetans to avoid connections with Taiwan because of its previous claims on Tibet (in the context of Guomindangist 'One China' rhetoric). This was said to be especially evidenced by its maintenance of the 'Tibet and Mongolia Association' within a quasi-governmental structure that represented Taiwan's continuing interest in the region. As Smith notes, the 'Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission' was created by the Guomindang in 1928, and 'was ostensibly responsible for the administration of Mongolia and Tibet but whose actual purpose was to convince Mongolians and Tibetans to return to the Chinese fold' (1996: 219). One middle-aged Tibetan man reasoned, 'they say, "you help us and we will help you," but they think Tibet is under China's power … They do not support independence [for Tibet].' I often pressed my interlocu-

tors to tell me where I might read His Holiness' statements about Taiwan, but never found an accurate print source. Indeed, I had heard several distinct and often contradictory sets of statements regarding Taiwan. All of them were by Tibetan individuals who prefaced their remarks with 'The Wish-fulfilling Jewel [the Dalai Lama] has said …,' and then told me that His Holiness had only told people not to accept donations or sponsorship of children from the *government* of Taiwan. Others maintained, 'He has said' that *all* connections with Taiwanese people should be abandoned.

This controversy has all but disappeared with the Dalai Lama's first visit to Taiwan in 1997. Several Tibetan friends in Seattle were well aware of his meeting with President Lee Teng-hui in March 1997, and we discussed the ramifications: had the 'Mongolian and Tibet Association' already been dissolved or would that come soon? had 'real' democracy come to Taiwan? and how many Taiwanese political parties might now repudiate the old Guomindang line claiming rights over greater China?.[29] More important for my discussion here is the way in which Taiwan was able to figure as an anti-national bogey, a material temptation that prefigures the decline of the nationalist spirit (and the spiritualized nation). At the same time, the Taiwanese jindaks have been a tremendous source of patronage for virtuous or religious activity (*dge-ba'i spyod-pa*), both monastery building and otherwise, around the Chorten of Bodhanath and elsewhere. The Taiwan controversy reveals the tensions inherent in the relation between jindak and recipient, a relationship that is often idealized in Buddhist discourse and yet that also draws attention to the dependence of the 'spiritual' guru upon 'worldly' support.

At one obvious level of analysis, the jindak relationship is about power and reciprocity. The figure of Taiwanese patrons bearing dangerous gifts not only speaks to fears of national 'purity' but also to the conflict inherent in such seemingly attractive relationships, when the lay patron demands too much or the spiritual recipient misuses what is given. Such conflict is not new, as Janet Gyatso's translation of the 'outer biography' of the eighteenth-century lama Jigme Lingpa ('Jigs-med gling-pa) reminds us.[30] Discussing this in another volume, Gyatso notes the 'subtle and complex aspects' of a jindak relationship, especially where the patron is politically powerful. During my conversations with Western Buddhists in Bodhanath, several expatriates seemed troubled by the nature of jindak–lama relationships. For some, like Jean and Tony mentioned above, it was disheartening to see that lamas needed financial backing and might actually have to devote some time and energy to securing it. A Canadian woman, Jennifer, was more sanguine about the necessity of patronage, but she nevertheless found it disturbing that money and financial backing from particular people seemed to win these 'big jindaks' special access to some Tibetan lamas. A month previous to my discussion with her, a group of Taiwanese jindaks had lavished attention on her teacher, taking him out to dinner constantly, but also wanting him to 'give [them] more wangs' (*dbang*; 'ritual empowerment'), which can be incredibly time-consuming for the lama to prepare and to bestow. The fact that Rinpoche was ill and about to begin a long

trip seemed to make no impression on the jindaks. 'They had Rinpoche going all the time,' she said incredulously. Jennifer has great respect for this teacher, and later told me that it wasn't so much that these jindaks received preferential treatment that bothered her, but that some jindaks really 'make the lamas hop to' and expect them to do all sorts of things *in return* for their contribution.

Here I suggest that one of the reasons that the jindak seems to trouble some Western Buddhists is largely due to a Christian (especially Protestant) antipodal logic in which money and spirituality are never to meet, although of course they do so constantly in practices like tithing, weekly church collections and even televangelism, all of which seem vaguely embarrassing to neo-liberal secular sentiments. If Tibetan Buddhism functions as an apparatus (and as an identity) that once, adopted by Westerners, can be used to critique 'the West,' then it must occupy an Other, purer, realm wherein true spirituality is not defiled by money and where money certainly should not be capable of buying access to the lama, or to spiritual 'empowerments.'

Ironically, it is this very fear that Tibetan Buddhist teachings or the lama himself may become another commodity that disturbs Jennifer, Tony and Jean. This, despite the fact that their very adoption of Tibetan Buddhist discourses of discipleship within the milieu of late twentieth-century economic practices creates the conditions for the realization of this anxiety. Having learned about the importance of the teacher in Tibetan Buddhist practice, Western Buddhists seek to create close and special relationships with their chosen gurus as the way to become better Buddhists. Or, to become 'special' in the eyes of others. But busy teachers such as Zopa, Thrangu and Chökyi Nyima Rinpoches cannot usually fulfill the expectations of all of their Western students-to-be, simply because their schedules do not permit the sort of intensive one-on-one attention that some Western students crave. The thought that one's chosen guru devotes more time to others is common jealousy within a framework of spirituality, but the added suspicion that his or her attention might be due to monetary obligations undermines the spiritual object because it has been constructed *in opposition* to a material realm. This dichotomy is then reified, so that money becomes both a 'traditional' means to shows one's devotion to a purely spiritual guru, and also the sign that denotes the way in which others might seek to commodify the teacher in ways unseemly to tradition.

I have argued then that money appears in different economies (the traditional Buddhist and the global-capitalist) in different ways; its significance in a Buddhist economy of merit is not completely transposable into a transnational capital-based system. Perhaps this is the hope of the anthropologist and of some Western Buddhists: that this difference can be articulated and money can be restored to its 'traditional' form within a Buddhist economy where it can be read as the mere substance of dana, a sign of veneration. This is a false hope, at least in the sense that money has always been multiply significant, incapable of being fixed within one economy of meaning. But it is worth paying attention to this 'hope,' with its dichotomous and often romantic assumptions, as well as its effects. The monasteries of Bodhanath are located within a transnational nexus

of finance, pilgrimage and exile, very much 'of the world,' but they also always already exist, in different and telling ways, in the imaginaries of Tibetans in exile, and Western travelers.

* * *

If my conversations with Jennifer, Tony and Jean seem to index similar doubts (albeit in divergent registers) about the ramifications of accepting powerful patronage, Gyaltsen Rinpoche's comments about Taiwanese jindaks are girded by the fear of national pollution that is particularly trenchant in light of the Tibetan diaspora.[31] The next chapter is concerned with themes hinted at in the early part of this discussion: how Bodhanath's monasteries and monks come to represent and (dis)figure the Tibetan nation as they are made safekeepers of the religious national-cultural essence. I also want to return to the notion of producing merit and examine the ways in which 'productivity' works within both monastic Buddhist frameworks and the economic structures of international capital. Therefore, it is vital to recall that both Buddhist and modernist discourses impinge upon the symbolic valency of the monasteries of Bodhanath at a particular moment, that is, within the context of *exile*.

5 Talking about monks

Discourses of tradition and productivity

> For [Turner, in Tibet in 1783] the close-up actualities of monastic life seemed at odds with the monks' wider role in sustaining a regulated social harmony. For Bogle [who traveled to Tibet in 1774] its boring routinization contrasted with the inspiration evoked by the lamas, the system's elite. For both men there was a split between the idealized fantasy and the unpleasant details. But neither seemed disturbed by this kind of contradiction; contradictions were integral to Tibet as a special place in the British imagination.
>
> (Bishop 1989: 57)[1]

The monasteries being built around the Great Chorten of Bodhanath, as much of the preceding discussion makes clear, are often read as the bulwark of Tibetan religious and cultural tradition. From the viewpoint of normative Buddhism, if monastic institutions in Tibet have always been concerned with maintaining the unbroken line of Sutra and Tantra transmission, and with the behavior and vows[2] that pertain to these, in exile this burden has been marked with greater intensity. Yet the gompas-in-exile are not replicas of their Tibetan originals; many of the examples discussed in the previous chapter indicate that tulku-founders are finding ways to 'update' their monastic institutions and allow for adaptive innovation. Nevertheless, the monasteries as significant sites-become-sights are sometimes examined, often critically, through the lens of the past; then they might be found lacking, or are seen as somehow not traditional enough.

This chapter examines the significance of monasteries and monastics to Tibetan and Western Buddhists by looking at the larger discourses in which they are enmeshed. What sort of imaginative landscape does the monk inhabit, and what sort of qualities is the monk thought to exhibit? What is at stake when the serene monk of Western media portrayals collides with the realities of monastic life for young novices in Bodhanath? These questions began as personal ones, as reflections on my own experiences with Tibetan Buddhist monks and monasteries that began in 1984. Actually, my experience with an imagined monastery and virtual monks started some time before that, with my exposure to Tibetan Buddhism via the written works of Tibetan lamas living in the United States. It is not my intent to dismiss out of hand the remarks about the 'decline' of

monastic comportment on the part of some Western and Tibetan Buddhists, yet nor will I reinscribe this anxiety as somehow evidence of monks' failings. Instead, I attend to the ways in which 'the monastery' and 'the monk' figure as indicators of my interlocutors' other, larger concerns.

Carrying the spirit of the nation

Bodhanath's monasteries represent Tibetan 'tradition' and, indeed, the essence of Tibetan 'culture' not only to Western observers but also to most local Tibetans. This resonates, of course, with ideas mentioned in chapter 2 concerning the figure of the tulku as an essentialized 'Tibet,' the nation writ on a spiritualized body. In the forty years since Tibetans fleeing the Chinese occupation entered Nepal and neighboring countries, a sublime spirituality has been inscribed as Tibet's national-cultural essence. Very briefly, this has been due to Tibet's historical place in a Euro-American imaginary; the post-colonial race toward nationhood, in which 'tradition' and 'cultural uniqueness' are foundational obligations; and the fact of exile, in which the now-absent nation is carried within Tibetan bodies. Tibetans are very aware of this: their cultural 'essence,' on which the nation depends, must be passed to the generation in-exile through education; it must likewise be visible to the world. Without powerful allies, their struggle to regain Tibet is already over.

For the most part, secular hunger strikes, to say nothing of calls to violent struggle, are not symbolically linked to an incipient Tibetan nation.[3] Indeed, Buddhist monks have figuratively and literally served as the carriers of this essential Tibetan uniqueness. As spiritual figures, they evoke the peaceful and otherworldly exoticism of a Western-imagined Tibet; monks represent this in a way that is only superseded by the most common Western metonym of Tibet, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Even for many Tibetans, monks evoke the cultural heart of their nation, and, as bearers of the Buddhist literary and oral traditions, they stand as vessels through which the normative ideals and values of the past may be transmitted to the present generations growing up outside the homeland. In monks, we find the slippage between Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan national-cultural matrix at its most complete, so that Tibetan 'religion' and Tibetan 'culture' become nearly synonymous.

This was explicitly portrayed in a New Year's card available in a shop in Bodhanath in 1994 (see Fig 5.2). The card reproduces a painting of a Tibetan monk flying over an expanse of water, an oversized Tibetan national flag in his hands over his head.[4] He is moving out from a rocky outcrop in the center of the water towards a 'white palace' that glows with diffused golden light on the promontory of the mainland. Below the scene on the card is a written key to its symbolic meaning: the 'pillar rock' represents 'Samsara and Chinese Suppression'; 'the monk with flag' symbolizes the 'Two Truths and Tibetan's [sic] Spirit'; 'the White Palace' stands for 'Nirvana and Free Tibet'; finally, 'the rays' which emanate from the palace represent 'Buddha and His Holiness's [the Dalai Lama's] Actions.'

The monk in his yellow and maroon garments literally carries the nation (represented by the flag) aloft. The monk himself manages to amplify the spiritual essence of Tibetans by exemplifying 'the two truths' (a central doctrine in Tibet's Mahayana Buddhism), as well as the 'spirit' of Tibetan people. There is another reading of monkhood here, specifically in the context of the struggles against Chinese oppression in Tibet: the 'White Palace' that the monk is flying towards represents not only 'Nirvana' but also a 'Free Tibet.' In recent years, many of the political demonstrations that have occurred in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) have been led by monks and nuns.[5] Doubly spiritual, the ideal monastic stands in opposition to the mundane world (*'jig-rten*) *and* to the even more emphatically materialist Chinese State; consequently he also figures the oppositional Nation. While monks and nuns may act firmly *in the world* as political demonstrators, it is also apparent that for some of these activist monks and nuns in Tibet, it is their vocation as monastics – being detached from the world and family – in addition to their self-identification as guardians of the Dharma, and indeed as people committed to acting for the benefit of other suffering transmigrators, that spurs them to action.[6] As one monk who had fled Tibet some three years earlier told me in 1993:

> We [monastics] have no spouse, no children, and actually we should abandon our family connections too, no? So we are the best [people] to demonstrate. For others [lay people] there is great fear … Because if they do [something] and are put in jail it is very difficult for their children, their spouse.

Another monk told me that he was willing to even engage in violence against the Chinese, although it would mean breaking his (Pratimoksa and Bodhisattva) vows. He explained that if he hurt others (Chinese soldiers) by throwing rocks, he would certainly have to pay for his actions. But, he reasoned, this place we live in now (Tibet) is already like hell; I am not afraid of going to hell again if what I do can have some benefit for others and for an independent Tibet.

In the last decade, Chinese officials have targeted monasteries and nunneries in Tibet as centers of 'splittist' (*kha-bral ring-lugs*) activities, and thus massive re-education campaigns have been waged against recalcitrant monastic separatists (i.e. Tibetan nationalists) so that they can correct their political views.[7] Importantly for my discussion here, this re-education involves forcing Tibetan clergy to recognize that the role of *true* monastics is 'religion' alone, and that by entering into incorrect political discourse monks falsify their vocation. This is a common criticism of the Dalai Lama in particular. For example:

> The Dalai Lama is *not an ordinary religious figure*, but instead a *political* activist in exile who has long been engaged in activities abroad to split China. Relying on the support of certain foreign forces, the Dalai clique has been further intensifying its activities to separate China, sabotage the national

> unity and the stability of Tibet, and is walking far and far away on the road of betraying the motherland and *forsaking the* [sic] *Tibetan Buddhism*.[8]

Of course, monasticism is hardly encouraged. According to Beijing's *Tibet Daily* (November 13, 1996), 'Religious culture … not only hampers social development and economic development, but also stops people becoming more civilized.' From the 1950s through the 1970s, monasticism itself was not allowed because it represented the feudal past and was completely contrary to China's project of modern development. As a sector of society that had once been 'apart' and above other 'classes,' monastics were deemed parasitic. Ironically, the PRC now seems to *need* the figure of the monk for its international mockup of a peaceful, liberated, and traditional Tibet, complete with freedom of religion (cf. Barnett 1994: 245). While monks are now allowed to exist (albeit with significant restrictions on numbers), the stipulation is that the monk must be returned to his proper place: the demi-monde of 'religion.' Ronald Schwartz, commenting on the 'Anti-Splittist Campaign,' makes a similar point:

> the understanding of religion which is incorporated into the Party's policy … allow[s for] the expression of 'voluntary religious faith' (*chos-dad rang-mos kyi srid-jus*). Religion is thus conceived as harmless superstition, at best a decorative feature of minority nationalities. Forcing it into this mould neutralises the explosive potential of religion to unite Tibetans as a nation. In the long run, modernisation and economic development are expected to make religious practices vestigial and irrelevant. It is on this assumption that religion is tolerated.
>
> (1994: 228)

Obviously, religion has become explosive in Chinese-controlled Tibet, and recent crackdowns make it unlikely that it will soon be otherwise.[9] For many independence-minded Tibetans I met in Bodhanath and in Seattle, the monks and nuns who struggle against China's occupation are national heroes. Tibetans are well aware of the great danger monastics court by speaking out and by demonstrating in Tibet; thus, their activity in the world is read as selfless and for the greater *national* good. Indeed, it appears that one of the primary reasons that some young Tibetans choose the monastic vocation is because it represents a uniquely Tibetan identity, one not colonized by Chinese policies (Havnevik 1994: 261–265). Being a monk or nun is to perhaps already be a patriot.

* * *

I want to draw attention to the gendering of the monastic figure, which for most of Buddhist history, and indeed for most Tibetans (and Western observers?) today remains represented as a monk. What then of the nun? If monks have always played a central role in the reproduction of Buddhism, nuns have always

been marginalized. In Bodhanath, Tibetan commentators never specifically mentioned nuns when they discussed their opinions about monks and monasticism with me. Western Buddhists, however, especially women, nearly always remarked on the 'situation' of Tibetan nuns. It is true that some anis in Tibet have been at the very forefront of political and religious demonstrations against Chinese rule, and their actions have helped move the symbolic figure of the nun more to the center of the national-cultural discourse in exile.[10] But by and large it is the attention of Western (and East Asian) Buddhist women, together with the recent efforts of Tibetan lamas, including the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Sixteenth Karmapa, that have shed light on the situation of nuns' lives, and rendered them significant. Yet even as they become more visible, nuns seem to problematize 'tradition' rather than unequivocally embody it.

Whereas the monk is the upholder of the Buddhadharma and the vital node through which the continuity of the vows and teachings is passed on, nuns have forfeited tradition, or have received tradition incomplete, because the 'full' vows (of a *dge-slong-ma*; Skt. bhiksuni) were never available in Tibet. While Sakyamuni Buddha himself provided for nuns' full ordination (they were expected to take a hundred more vows than their fully ordained male brethren, and submit to them in all matters), this lineage apparently never reached the Himalayan area, and could not be introduced without a quorum of already ordained bhiksuni to pass it on. Thus contemporary nuns *lack* what monks have long had access to, whether it is full monastic vows or educational opportunities (beginning with basic literacy). Further, nuns never constituted a social group anywhere near as large as the total number of male monastics in Tibet. Lopez (1997: 21) estimates that between 10 and 15 per cent of Tibet's male population was made up of monks; nuns constituted 'perhaps three percent' (see also Goldstein and Tsarong 1985: 16, and Samuel 1993: 309, 578–582). Lastly, women's monastic institutions had little to no political, economic or even religious power in the face of entrenched male privilege within the Buddhist traditions of Tibet.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, both Thrangu Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche have established separate monastic institutions for women in Bodhanath. In 1993, several years before his ani-gompa was completed, I received a maroon-colored fundraising pamphlet from Claire, an American student of Thrangu Rinpoche; Claire had helped design the brochure, and her name and address were listed on the back as contacts for donation purposes. The double-sided, folded pamphlet featured small photos of the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa, the (previous) head of the Karma Kagyu order, and Thrangu Rinpoche. Positioned next to this was a letter from Thrangu Rinpoche explaining his project and soliciting donations (the construction of the nunnery was estimated to cost $300,00). The letter features the most strongly worded critique of Tibetan gender bias that I have seen in print by a Tibetan spiritual teacher, together with an appeal to foreigners for aid in establishing a new, and yet ultimately 'traditional' ani-gompa. I quote here from just one part of Rinpoche's appeal:

> Tibetan cultural biases have traditionally led to inferior education and training for Tibetan women. The situation is, therefore, that the success of this project will depend upon the support, financial and other, of people from the West and the Far East where men and women have equal educational opportunities. I envision that close links will be established between Thrangu Nunnery and foreign dharma practitioners and centers, that my nuns will go abroad to teach and study, and that foreigners will come to the nunnery to teach and study.[11]

Thus, this gompa aims to produce a nun who is nearly the equal of a monk; she is allowed for the first time ever to have the same opportunities for reading and study (in both traditional Tibetan monastic subjects and new 'Western' ones) as well as in Buddhist practice. Explained elsewhere in the brochure, this ani will have the opportunity to become a fully ordained nun, a role that has never been available to nuns in any of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions previously.[12] And some anis may be sent abroad to take up a hitherto rare position in Tibetan society: a female teacher. The 'traditional' nun in such a Tibetan gompa then is in most ways also a *new* kind of nun, enabled for the first time to hold the full vows and obligations a bhiksuni might have had under Sakyamuni Budddha himself, and hopefully generating a new respect for the Buddhist nun's position in the Himalayan regions.

In the last sentence of his letter, Rinpoche asks 'that foreign dharma students and friends consider contributing generously to this project.' The powerful Buddhist notion of alms giving, exemplified by making offerings to the Sangha, is never explicitly invoked, though contributing to the building of a gompa is certainly (given proper motivation) a virtuous undertaking capable of producing spiritual merit (*bsod-nams*). Equally possible is that 'friends' who wish to contribute may do so on the basis of a humanist feminism, that is by wishing to help Tibetan women who have been denied equal access to their 'tradition.' Ironically, most Western lay women have far greater opportunities to study and practice Tibetan Buddhism than most Tibetan anis have traditionally had at their disposal, especially in the first two decades in exile, when Tibetan nuns were a lower priority than monks. In the 1980s and 1990s, the situation has improved dramatically, and continues to do so. However, some nun activists' seeming dependence on Western (and Far Eastern) aid both exemplifies Tibetan requests for foreign jindaks to save Tibetan religion-culture, even as it also seems to cast this request for aid in a new light: save us (women) from our (patriarchal) culture. Tradition is good, except when it is bad.

If the situation of nuns did not provoke anxiety among my Tibetan interlocutors concerned with tradition and the essence of the nation, it did raise concern among some Western travelers in Bodhanath for what it might signify about the problematics of 'the tradition' itself. That is, many feminist-minded women (and a few men) expressed disappointment, and occasional outrage, at the treatment of nuns in relation to their male counterparts in Tibetan Buddhist institutional practices.[13] At the same time, many foreigners I spoke with found that nuns

offered a truer or more 'courageous' model of Buddhist behavior when compared with their male counterparts. Nuns persevere in religious practice despite the obstacles they face because of their gender, and despite the unlikelihood of ever being praised for their conduct.[14]

There are still only a few nunneries in the Kathmandu Valley as compared to the monasteries, and they still lack the facilities and access to teachers that monks regularly obtain. Yet today, many Tibetan Buddhist teachers from all of the four sectarian lineages encourage the development of ani-gompas, often with the close participation of their foreign disciples. This development, along with the introduction of the gelongma tradition into Tibetan Buddhism via Chinese Dharmagupta Vinaya lineages, has made contemporary Tibetan nuns in exile the beneficiaries of transnational attention and sites/sights for the inscription of the neo-traditional. That is, unlike the figure of the monk, the nun seems to represent the incarcerating or repressive aspect of tradition (in this case understood as patriarchy) that under the modernist/reformist gaze of foreign Buddhists and concerned Tibetans is stripped away. What is left is the fully ordained bhiksuni returned to her rightful place within Buddhist tradition, or rather a new and improved 'traditional Buddhism.'

Gardens amidst the garbage: separation, sacralization and virtuosi

For some, the politically engaged monastics of occupied Tibet are heroes (and martyrs) in the service of an endangered nation. Yet, representations of monks and even monasteries in exile today often appear ambiguous. When discussing monks with Bodhanath Tibetans and Western Buddhists, there was nearly always a contrast between the normative monastic behavior that my interlocutors felt monks *should* exhibit, and the perceived reality of the situation in Kathmandu. Monks become contentious symbols, both praised and blamed, for those concerned with cultural essences and national traditions. My focus here on critical talk – what many Tibetans would consider negative – largely follows from what I heard. A virtuous monk, especially one behind the gompa walls, provides little to remark upon.

One of the most frequent criticisms from both Western observers and Tibetans alike, is that monasteries are *meant* to be places apart, but in Bodhanath they are all very close to each other, and to all the tourist shops, tea stalls, chang (beer) houses and video arcades. According to Lopez (1997: 21), the word 'gompa' (*dgon-pa*) connotes a remote or solitary place, and indeed many gompa in Tibet were set apart from towns and villages. Ann Forbes remarks on the reputation of some of Nepal's Tibetan monasteries:

> The Dalai Lama is concerned that in Boudha in particular, the constant intermingling of monks with the lay population is undermining the 'proper discipline and proper decorations' that a monastery must maintain. 'There are certain rules and regulations that monks have to follow,' he has said,

> 'and in the existing monasteries in Nepal, some are not following these strictly.' Tenzin Gyeche, his personal secretary, elaborated: 'Many times the monasteries are just there because of tradition or to make money. The monasteries in south India maintain the proper dress and proper discipline; monasteries in Nepal are of the same lineage but the tradition is not proper. Monks roam around, they go to movies. Whenever this happens, it is better for them not to be a monk.'
>
> (1989: 123)

In Tenzin Gyeche's commentary (and perhaps for the Dalai Lama too, given his reformist and 'modern' reputation), 'tradition' can either be valuable, a treasured legacy to pass on, or it can connote an empty gesture that needs to be interrogated rather than unconsciously reproduced. I spoke with several Tibetan lay people at length about the monasteries in Bodhanath, and many of their remarks seemed to echo the statements made by His Holiness: the monasteries were too close to the marketplace, and some monks were therefore hanging around tea shops and watching videos rather than studying. When I asked why the monasteries were built so close together, both lay people and the lamas themselves answered that gompas are meant to be built near powerful sites (*gnas-chen*). The Chorten of Jarungkhashor certainly qualifies in this respect, as does the Kathmandu Valley's other great Buddhist site, the Chorten of *'Phags-pa shing-kun* (Nepali: Swayambhunath), which has likewise experienced a huge increase in the construction of Tibetan monasteries in its vicinity. Obviously many monasteries were established in Bodhanath in order to benefit from the presence of the Chorten, and perhaps secondarily due to the availability of land and lay patrons. One man reminded me that some monasteries were built near the Chorten *before* so many lay Tibetans had moved into the area surrounding the monument; at that time, he said, 'it was all [agricultural] fields here, [with just] a few houses.'

Dawa, a Tibetan who has lived in Bodhanath for most of his life, was the most outspoken critic of all. The monasteries, he said, are too many. How can so many monasteries be of any benefit? Why not build hospitals, and nursing homes – like in the West – for our old people? At the start they will cost a lot to build and to run, but many Tibetans have made a lot of money here in Nepal and they can pay for good care. People could even be trained in the Western-style of administering these hospitals and nursing homes, and make them really clean. Months later, when I had another similar conversation with Dawa, he reiterated his criticism of the monasteries in Bodhanath. 'There are too few good monks, and some of these gompas are half-empty. Why build more?' But, Dawa told me, the monasteries in South India are *truly* good: the monks there 'work in their fields [to support the gompa] and there is strict discipline. And whereas if you have *zhabs-brtan* [i.e. ritual services] performed here you must pay at least 20 rupees per monk, there the monks will do it and be happy with 2 rupees!'

Other Tibetans I spoke with were far more circumspect about their criticisms, if any, of the monasteries in Bodhanath. If Dawa's comments appear marked by modernity and its discursive devices (i.e. the presence of so many monasteries

makes no *productive* sense; Tibetans should instead build hospitals and nursing homes; good monks, like those in South India, *work* the land to contribute to their gompa); my friend Tsering's remarks from the summer of 1993 are drawn from a Buddhist perspective in which gompas and their shrine halls are most certainly 'productive,' though in a another register:

> People see a lama's behavior, but they cannot see his motivation [or intention]. We don't know why a lama does what he does – but if it were not for the activity of the lamas we would have no opportunity to do meritorious actions: lamas build gompas and lha khangs [shrines], places to offer lamps; make prostrations; pray; and also give us the opportunity of being a jindak and thereby gain great merit.

For many Western visitors to Bodhanath the monasteries represent the vitality of Tibetan culture-in-exile. Himalayan anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf noted that:

> the ability of homeless and impoverished groups of refugees to build and fund in foreign lands numerous monasteries of a remarkably high architectural standard and their success in developing viable monastic communities similar to those of Tibet is one of the miracles of the twentieth century.
> (1989: 2)

But as signs of an imagined essence, the *actual* monasteries can also provoke disappointment: the real does not live up to the fantasy. Numerous Western Buddhists, and Western tourists as well, told me of their disgust at the filth that seemed to dominate the sacred landscape of Bodhanath. Specifically, it was the ubiquitous large piles of garbage, many of them located on unused land or on land that bordered some of the largest Tibetan monasteries, that upset travelers the most. I include myself in that group, literally overcome at times by the power of ripening refuse, and finding it nearly laughable that anyone could wax eloquent about Bodhanath as an ideal place to live.

At the annual seminar given by Thrangu Rinpoche in early 1993, a German woman remarked to me on the beautiful view from the monastery's upper porch toward the nearby Chorten, glowing in the late morning sun. But she also cautioned me to not look over the edge of the porch toward the garbage-pitted grounds in front of the monastery, or 'the view is really going to be ruined.' Barbara Crossette voices a similar lament about Bodhanath in *So Close to Heaven*:

> The problem is underfoot. The once-gentle mountain meadows on which these gompas – monasteries – stand are strewn with garbage, trash, and human waste. Pink and green plastic bags take the place of spring flowers among tufts of grass where scrawny dogs root for rotting scraps of food … The monastery temple – an arresting gold-trimmed, deep red building several stories high – occupies the center of the courtyard, its triple-tiered

> pagoda roof rising above an ornate portico held up by slender pillars whose capitals are lavishly painted in religious motifs. The temple's stone steps are littered with plastic sandals and running shoes, not the soft velvet-thonged slippers of Burmese monks. Inside the monastic walls almost no vegetation has survived the human traffic. Is this a life of peace in natural harmony with the environment, which every Buddhist has a duty to protect? How far had I come from the monasteries of Bhutan?
>
> (1995: 46)

In the paragraph following this sanctimonious (and overly picaresque: there have never been 'mountain meadows' in the Kathmandu Valley's agricultural land) description, Crossette does explain that her journeys into Buddhist Himalayan locales forced her to confront 'stereotypes of simplicity and serenity that we expect to define a Buddhist universe' (ibid.). Nevertheless, the reader has a hard time escaping from the feeling that these monasteries in Bodhanath are *not* the real thing, and that there is a more authentic gompa out there, especially in light of the author's remarks about 'soft velvet-thonged slippers' of the Burmese (versus the plastic sandals and running shoes of Tibetan monks) and her inclination to judge the filthy and illicitly modern Shechen by how far it lies from 'the monasteries of Bhutan.'[15]

Many of the Western travelers I spoke with in Bodhanath first effused over its landscape littered with monasteries, and then became dejected by its mountains of litter, reading the latter as the encroachment of unbridled materialism and modernity into the sanctity of 'traditional' space (as Crossette does) or even into the realm of traditional Tibetan values. Some Westerners directly linked the state of the environment in Bodha to the Tibetans' infatuation with material progress at the expense of their 'traditional values.' As Peg said to me, 'I don't think Tibetans know about community. You can just tell by looking at all the garbage that Tibetans don't work communally here [in Bodhanath].' Others, including several Western Buddhists who found Bodhanath an ideal place to live, put the garbage out of their minds; for them the monasteries, masters and the Chorten were Bodhanath. One of my most religiously devoted American friends instructed me to view the garbage as a challenge for the Buddhist practice of 'pure perception.'[16]

All of these different discourses represent the ideal gompa as a place *apart* from the world, the world of the mundane. This bifurcation of worlds might originally derive from normative Buddhist ideas about the perils of samsara and concomitant injunctions to the Sangha to withdraw from the world in order to transcend it.[17] Such a connotation is found in the word 'ling' (*gling*), which is appended to the name of nearly every monastery in Bodhanath. Ling denotes an island, a continent, a place set apart or alone. Monasteries are, as it were, gardens (*gling-ka*) or islands of the Dharma in the midst of the garbage of samsara.

As many scholars from Weber onwards have noted, the rejection of the world often yields intense attention and validation from the worldly.[18] In Theravada

and Tibetan Buddhist societies today, and indeed throughout much of South and Southeast Asia, those who significantly retreat from the world of culture – Thai forest monks, Himalayan sadhus, Tibetan hermits – are credited with spiritual power and insight even beyond that of their village or urban-dwelling counterparts.[19] But there is more at stake here than the replication of a normative Buddhist discourse about renunciation and withdrawal from the world. In the contemporary context of diasporic Tibetans and expatriate Westerners, the gompa's separation from the world is reinforced by Tibetan desires for a stable and self-contained national-culture as well as Western desires to locate a stable, pure and authentic Buddhism.

Let me return to the significance of the 'natives' of these Dharma-isles, the monks of Bodhanath. As has already been noted, the assembly of monastics represent the Third Jewel of the Three Jewels of Buddhism, the Sangha (*dge-'dun dkon-mchog*), which according to Tibetan practice also includes Tantric adepts and lay spiritual practitioners. It is the representative quality of the monk that must be respected, for the monastic points to a superior way, and indeed indexes both the Buddha and the Dharma as the foundations of the Sangha. In the spring of 1994, I was present when an esteemed Tibetan lama mentioned this in the course of teaching a group of Western students. He commented that when one gives or practices generosity, it is best to give to the ordained Sangha, because of what they stand for. Further, it is largely irrelevant what kind of a monk they really are, because one does not give to them as a more or less flawed human being but as an exemplar of the Buddhadharma. In this way, the master continued, the merit that accrues from this sort of true devotion and selfless giving is great. His remarks echoed what lay Tibetans had told me: it was not good to speak ill of monks or lamas (though it was difficult not to all the same, largely because of the significance of their social roles).

Thus, while it is a commonplace to remark on the centrality of the ordained Sangha in Buddhism's normative order, I found that in daily talk the monk often troped a troublesome presence, signifying concern about – and disappointment in – the moral-traditional, and national order. Criticisms by Western Buddhists and Tibetan exiles in Bodhanath alike focused on the monk, fixing him in the sights of, and as a site for, tradition. When I thought about some of my monk friends, and the way their behavior was held up to scrutiny, it sometimes seemed that they were inmates of their monastic islands, fixed and observed like 'natives' in the anthropological canon.

I interviewed Paul, a 40-year-old American expatriate Buddhist, on a sunny morning in 1993. He was a part-time trekking guide, part-time masseuse, and had been involved with his Tibetan teacher's social and religious projects since he first arrived in Kathmandu in the early 1980s. Paul was also extremely critical of monasticism and monasteries in the Kathmandu Valley, even as he was also self-reflective about his opinions. After I mentioned stories that I had heard about some monks in Bodhanath from local Tibetans, featuring motorcycle-riding and a flair for decidedly non-monastic garb, Paul laughed and rejoindered:

> Yeah. Gucci shoes! … Yeah, it's my own expectations or presumptions about humility and um, taking the vows, and the lifestyle you are supposed to lead under those conditions. Where's the modeling for those of us that are trapped in all this materialistic garbage? I guess it's my presumptiveness that it's the monks that are supposed to be outside of it or are beginning to work their way outside of it. You know they've taken on a lifestyle that reinforces a different set of values, and to see them in almost blatant contradiction or collateral coexistence – you know, side by side – is just hard for me … See if you go to Tulshig ['Khrul-zhig] Rinpoche's monastery in Junbesi [in the southern part of the Solu-Khumbu region, several days' walk from the road end], you don't see this bullshit, at all. You see people up there who are working hard, doing their karma yoga everyday and hauling stones on their back to build segments of the monastery. I mean when was the last time you saw a monk around Bodhanath hauling stones to build a monastery? It's the coolies hauling the stones to build the monasteries! … There was never a monastery in Nepal that I wanted to be in except for that one …

I am particularly interested in the way that Paul notes the relativity of his criticisms, even as he sets up one gompa in particular as the very paragon of the 'right way' to build and run a monastery. Indeed, one of the reasons that Tulshig Rinpoche's monastery is able to function as legitimate for Paul is because of its location far away from the bustle of Bodhanath, and because of the seriousness of its inhabitants. This was underscored by his closing remarks to me, in which he said that Buddhism *should* translate into the world; 'these accessible lamas' of Bodhanath will teach for those Western people who need a sort of 'rah-rah' enthusiasm to turn their attention to Dharma. Thus there may be a place for the 'cheer-leader' teachers who appeal to the Western travelers' set, but he also intimates that the place they occupy is less authentic, and their audience is less than committed to the Dharma. Finally, note the place of the monk-as-sign in Paul's narrative. Monks are *a priori* apart from the mundane world, and are supposed to be 'modeling' their exalted alterity to the rest of us mired in the 'garbage' of life.

* * *

One day in late 1993, I was discussing Tibetan Buddhist ritual with an American monk in his late fifties or so, and a Canadian Buddhist friend, Jeff. The monk, called by his Tibetan name, Sonam, was visiting a gompa in Nepal for several months, but said that he didn't take much part in the daily monastic gatherings. The ritual texts were read far too rapidly for him to follow along, and he couldn't possibly get their meaning. Besides, Sonam wasn't very impressed with this speed reading as a form of Buddhist practice; he thought that very few Tibetan monks actually *understand* what they read, maybe two or three out of ten. I opined that there certainly are many monks, especially the young ones, who do not understand the meanings of the texts they read entirely, but I also argued that perhaps

reading comprehension is not the only measure of whether one is a successful reader. Sonam laughed and added that he was sure the Tibetan monks did not respect him very much; 'I cannot do many of the things *they* think monks are supposed to do.'

Jeff, in his early forties and a Buddhist for well over a decade, was disturbed by the lack of 'concentration' exhibited by many monks as they performed their rituals in the central hall of the gompa. He noted that during 'the most important part' of many rituals (the *rdzogs-rim*, or 'completion stage' – wherein the visualization of oneself as the deity is 'dissolved,' and the meditator rests in equipoise) the monks usually keep right on reading, rather than pausing and 'resting in their own nature,' as the texts indicate should be done. He then qualified his critique, saying 'we shouldn't be critical of what we see, but should recognize … [that] this is what we should *not* be doing … That's what I think when I see the monks spacing out during the rituals.' I identified with Jeff's reluctance to criticize the monks outright, but was also struck by the way that our own expectations of what a model monk should look and act like created the conditions for our own disappointment, such that an actual monk could somehow stand for a model of what a Buddhist should *not* be.

Justine, an American woman in her mid-thirties who had visited Nepal several times, recounted her initial 'shock' at discovering there were 'lazy' monks; even monks who were in the monastery because, as it seemed to her, 'they didn't want to work.' To her, finally, it seemed that there were 'many monks who don't even care about the Dharma.' She never told me exactly how she came to these conclusions, but her comments seem to index a notion of productivity that derives from Euro-American notions of efficiency, even as they represent the ideal monk as a 'traditional' figure outside of – even in opposition to – the economic pressures of everyday life. The real conditions that propel many boys into the gompas, and the daily rounds of study, memorization, and ritual practices that are the norm once there, are never considered, but are lost in the glare of an idealized monk figure.[20]

Having lived in Nepal for some time, some Western Buddhists like Jeff, Sonam and Justine thought they had gained – as one of them put it to me – 'a more realistic view of monks.' More 'realistic,' it turns out, than those Western Buddhists that have just arrived, perhaps to stay in Bodhanath for a few weeks or months. For many of the latter there has been little exposure to monks or a monastic setting, except through a performance with the 'famous' Gyüto or Sera Je monks on one of their American tours, or perhaps solely through Western popular media representations. The incredible chant styles of the Gyüto monks and the intricate sand mandalas painstakingly created by monks from Sera (or Drepung or Ganden) in one of the universities or museums in the USA announce the presence of virtuosi; yet such an image is then projected onto *all* monks. Very few of the great many books on Tibetan Buddhism in English treat the subject of contemporary (or even historical) monastic life at all. Even after several months, sometimes several years in Bodhanath, many Western Buddhists return home without having had much contact with monks, except for those that

serve as the attendants of high lamas. And language barriers help maintain the active misrepresentations that prevail on both sides.

My own imagined monastery collapsed after spending three months living in a Tibetan gompa in Bodhanath in 1984. I was twenty; I was Catholic; I expected something Cistercian, but even more exotic. That is, I expected silence, severe discipline, and lots and lots of meditation. I asked one of my new monk friends about my age, 'when do you meditate?' He looked a bit put off. 'I don't meditate – but maybe I will learn later.' Later an older monk told me much the same thing; he would like to do a retreat, he said, but not now. No time. He said that he had to study and prepare the tormas (*gtor-ma*) and other ritual offerings, do ceremonies (*zhabs-brtan*) in people's houses, take part in the main rituals in the assembly hall, and clean his room, himself, and his clothes besides. And for many of the Western Buddhists like myself that I met, this is indeed news; disappointing news.

It is not to say that Tibetan monks do not meditate, nor that many rituals are not painstakingly performed. But there is a gap between our generalizing whitewash of monks' lives and the realities of daily work for many monks. For example, the quintessential aspect of monks' labor was believed by many Western Buddhists to be 'meditation' – indeed there sometimes seems to be a fetishization of meditation, such that it becomes synonymous with Buddhism itself. This elides the tremendous importance of ritual observances and all the work that such performances involve, to say nothing of the clerical, custodial and educational labor of the monks. The performance of rites, like the other work, ensures the daily functioning and continuation of the monastery's Buddhist traditions. Further, they bring benefit not only to the gompa itself, but to the surrounding community.

Tibetan teachers do ascribe tremendous importance to meditation, and give a great deal of instruction to Western disciples on its practice. Yet for many Tibetans, it remains the province of specialists. One effect of the elite Buddhist discourse that privileges the virtuoso practitioner is traceable in the way in which monks' labor has been (mis)understood by some Western visitors to Bodhanath.[21] Further, expertise in meditation, ritual arts, and scholastic study are not necessarily on the decline due to contemporary conditions in exile; for as much as some of Bodhanath's gompas are imaginatively paired with their forerunners in Tibet, it is important to bear in mind that a significant part of the monastic population in pre-modern Tibet was made of up of men who served as support staff for those we might see as the religious virtuosi. Lopez writes that:

> In Tibetan society there was a rather clear demarcation between the roles of monks and laypeople, a demarcation that seemed to be rigidified in exile. In Tibet only about 25 percent of the monks at the three great monasteries around Lhasa had been engaged in the scholastic curriculum and of these only a small portion went beyond rather elementary levels. The rest of the monks pursued a variety of occupations, employed either by the monasteries or engaged in their own business. There were monks whose duty it was to

> propitiate the protective deities of the monastery, there were monks who cooked and brewed vats of Tibetan tea, and monks who took for themselves the task of enforcing order … The monk-layman occupational division was changed in exile, where almost all the monks were engaged in the scholastic curriculum at some level.
>
> (1995: 274–275)

Despite the fact that proportionally more monks than ever before – even in Bodhanath – seem to be engaged in the study and practice of the specific curricula of their monasteries, it seems that for many Western Buddhists who come a little too close, the monks of Bodhanath are still found lacking when compared to the ideal religious adepts they are imagined to be. Monks, for many Western Buddhists, are paragons of Buddhist practice, and for those of us who wish to become 'better' Buddhists, as Paul noted in his comments above, there is the expectation that monastics will provide the model.

In fact, a small percentage of Western Buddhists include women and men who have taken the teachings of the Buddha to heart to such an extent that they have taken monastic ordination. Several of these monastics have become teachers in their own right, and more than a few Western Buddhist teachers and academicians have spent some time as monks or nuns in one of the Tibetan traditions. In the Winter 1995 (vol. 5, 2) edition of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, several guest writers weighed in on the theme 'Monasticism at the Millennium: In or Out?,' explicitly reflecting on the constituents of a 'Western' Buddhism and the place of monasticism within it. Ordained American nun Pema Chödrön was one of these writers; as the director of Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia and the author of several books, she is one of the most important Western teachers in Tibetan Buddhism today. Her comments below reflect on life in a monastic community:

> The idealized notion is that somehow you're coming to this place where everything is smooth for you, where everybody does things the way you think they should. And now you have to face the fact that here's a monk or nun who has been there for a long time and who should, you think, be a model of everything. But for you this person is not a model because they don't live up to your expectations. This particular monk or nun lets you down, disappoints you, because you have high expectations.
>
> (*Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Winter 1995, vol. 5, 2: 43–44)

At the close of her article Ani Pema Chödrön writes that life as a monastic is 'tough because there are no exits and you come up so close to yourself.' But by entering into mimesis with a model-life, especially one that has been 'idealized' as much as monasticism, there is also the possibility that one comes up close to the Other.

In February of 1993, I met a British woman in her late thirties in a tiny Tibetan restaurant off the main road of Bodhanath. We struck up a conversa-

tion after Rose, like every other foreigner I had met in Bodhanath, had asked what I was doing, where I was from and the like. We met again several weeks later, and she asked me about studying Tibetan and Buddhist Studies in the USA, something she had been considering for the last couple of years, and then we began talking in depth about my research. As we discussed how we Westerners see Tibetans, Rose remarked that we often want – at first – to *become like them*: learn Tibetan, dress in Tibetan clothing. She said that she knew of 'many' Western monks and nuns who had left their vows after several years because they 'realized' they were not Tibetans and never would be. Further, she noted, these Western monastics realized that being a monastic didn't fit their 'culture.' Tibetan Buddhist monasticism it seemed, was too Other to be incorporated by many Western people. The longer one is involved in Tibetan Buddhism, Rose maintained, the more we realize that we have 'our own cultures,' and with this our 'identification' with Tibetans ends. She said she was at the point where she didn't want to stay in Nepal: 'It isn't where I belong.'

Several weeks after our meeting Rose returned to Singapore; shortly afterward I found out from mutual acquaintances that she herself had been a Tibetan Buddhist nun. Perhaps she was speaking from experience? Drawing near to the Other through adopting a monastic identity, did she then find the self she thought she had left behind? Whatever her discovery, it seemed clear that Rose felt compelled to re-draw the lines around this slippery thing called identity, while using the tools – 'culture,' 'Buddhism,' 'monasticism' – it is spoken through.

On 'productivity' and the labor of monks

If 'tradition' proved to be the ground that monks were expected to inhabit and monasteries adhere to, it often seemed that 'productivity' was the shadow foundation upon which praises to monasticism and critiques of individual monks were built. According to authoritative religious discourse and pious lay Tibetans' comments that echo it, the monastic exemplifies the apogee of productive human life. Unlike the 'ordinary' person mired in the world, who seeks wealth, friends, reputation and other acquisitions that cannot last beyond death and that finally bring only sorrow, the monk or nun ideally cultivates virtue (*dge-ba*) through renouncing such activity, producing something which has profound positive effects for future lives. By entering the gompa, he or she seeks a way out of suffering rather than producing even more of it.

To the Chinese 'liberators' of Tibet, such a notion of productivity was patent superstition and thus a barrier to the progressive development of the Tibetan minority. In this Maoist (or indeed in any materialist-modernist) conception of productivity, monasteries are relics to be discarded. In the past, the truly productive masses had toiled only to find their labor appropriated by monastic estates and nobles. Neither this language nor the sentiments behind it are out of vogue in China, according to Giles Hewitt, a reporter for Agence France Presse.

His article, 'China Signals a Severe Religious Crackdown in Tibet,' quotes widely from 'the official *Tibet Daily*' in China:

> Building and maintaining temples was using up valuable financial and labour resources to the detriment of other areas, such as primary education, [the *Tibet Daily*] said, adding that some temples forced even impoverished local residents to support them financially. Reiterating Karl Marx's celebrated maxim that religion was the opium of the masses, the article [in the *Tibet Daily*] said Tibetan Buddhism had 'completely infiltrated Tibet's economic and social life and interfered with politics … which is neither in China's interests nor the interests of Tibet's modernisation.'
>
> (November 13, 1996)[22]

Here monasticism in general is the subject of Chinese critique. In contrast, in pre-1950 Tibet, it seems likely that individual monks provided a site for lay Tibetans' barbed comments and critique, much as they do today. Further, while there is little written evidence to go by, one can be sure that many, if not most, Tibetans felt overburdened by the huge monastic estates that demanded labor, good, and even their sons as tax payments. And there was even critique from inside the system itself, ranging from the famous monk Gendun Chophel to the Thirteenth Dalai himself, who tried to reform and modify the power of the Sendregasum (Goldstein 1989). But if my discussions with Tibetan exiles are any indication, the long-standing, indeed 'traditional' ideal of monastic life – that is, becoming a monk and giving up worldly life – had rarely been seriously questioned, nor had the notion of spiritual productivity that it rests upon. Indeed, despite their critical comments about individual monks, most Tibetans (and Western Buddhists) still maintain that a monk's life, when lived correctly, is ultimately meaningful and productive. By attacking monasticism and monks themselves for all that they seem to represent, the Chinese state has helped create the conditions wherein monks signify at least an autonomous Tibetan cultural sphere, and more perilously, an independent Tibetan national and cultural identity.

At the same time, the Chinese government response to Tibetan monasticism is equivocal. National minorities, marked by distinctive 'cultures' and traditions, are encouraged to further develop these, especially if they are deemed 'civilizing.' But they will be reined in if seen to encourage splittism, or independence from the beneficence of the Chinese nation. According to recent work by leading Tibet scholars (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998), monasticism in both the Tibetan Autonomous Region and ethnically Tibetan regions of the PRC is *variously* regulated, monitored, and sometimes encouraged, if in a narrow sense. Goldstein's in-depth study of Drepung (Tibet's largest monastery before 1959), including both its 'traditional' and contemporary situations, painstakingly addresses the ways in which the question of monastic productivity, and specifically the question of monastic quality versus quantity, have resurfaced since religious liberalization policies were introduced in the TAR in 1980. 'Resurfaced' in that, as Goldstein

notes, the debate about quantity versus quality had already appeared in Drepung monastery's Gomang 'college' (with serious repercussions) in 1958–1959 (Goldstein 1998: 31–34). The debate was provoked by concern at how few high-ranking scholars (geshe) were being produced in Gomang, which in turn was largely due to two factors: the immense time input necessary to reach this level of scholarship, and the monastery's lack of financial support for incipient scholars who did not have the time available, as ordinary monks did, to find ways of supporting themselves. There is good evidence that this 'debate' or tension existed far earlier, for example the reforms attempted by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and certain of his 'modernist' contemporaries (Goldstein 1989: *passim*), and even during the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Ahmad 1970). In short, however, as the 'new' Drepung emerged in the early to mid-1980s, it was decided by the 'Democratic Management Committee' that:

> monks in the new Drepung would either have to pursue the full-time study curriculum in Buddhist theology or engage in productive work on behalf of the monastery. The formal Buddhist studies curriculum would be revived and monastic life would be structured so that as many monks as possible could devote themselves to the study of Buddhist theology.
>
> (Goldstein 1998: 33)

As Goldstein also makes clear, there are governmental restrictions on the number of monks (six hundred) allowed to take up residence at Drepung and there are often unenforced regulations stipulating that entering monks be eight een years of age.[23] In addition, with the dismantling of the traditional monastic economies based on land and labor holdings, it is obvious that the ten thousand monks Drepung once held could never be cared for properly under contemporary economic and political conditions in Tibet. Yet he finds that Drepung's work co-operatives, along with important lay support in the form of alms-giving, have enabled most of today's monks to live very well, and a larger percentage than ever before is actively engaged in higher level Buddhist studies.

Regulated Buddhist monasticism (as expressed in scholastic knowledge and philosophical study) is governmentally legitimate in the contemporary PRC; what is not deemed legitimate, or useful, from the government's perspective is the mere presence of monks, except perhaps as sights for tourists to Tibet. Given Chinese government restrictions on the number of young men allowed to enter monasteries, the relatively advanced age at which training may legally begin (despite the fact that it may be unenforced in some areas), and a report that monks over the age of sixty in a monastery in Qinghai were being 'given retirement' by local government officials, it seems clear that a different sort of productivity is envisioned for today's Tibetan monks, when they are envisioned as productive at all.[24] Were Tibetans to live up to all the rules, they would act as monks for their adult years, entering the workforce and exiting it much as a factory worker might. Indeed, many of the largest Tibetan monasteries in the TAR today seem like little more than offices, with fixed hours and visiting times.

Unlike some of the Western tourists and even some Western Buddhists that I met, Bodhanath Tibetans do not expect most ordinary monks to be religious virtuosi, or even symbols of otherworldliness. For example, Tibetan lay people did not chastise monks for not meditating; according to most Tibetan monks and lay people I spoke with, meditation is something best carried out in a retreat environment, farther away from the city. But lay Tibetans in Bodhanath did criticize many monks for what they perceived as their lack of discipline, their laziness and their interest in inappropriate things:

> Many young monks are just lazy – they don't study and pay attention to their teachers like they should. They just sit around the tea shops, go see movies in town, some even have televisions in their rooms I heard, and you have seen a few riding on motorcycles, haven't you?

An older Tibetan woman shopkeeper remarked:

> So many false monks! They come to my shop and [try on] rings, wear green and blue shirts, and a few nights ago, when I could not sleep because of my leg pains, I saw one from my window, walking around the precious Chorten, smoking! They never listen to [His Holiness Dalai Lama] …

This was a common refrain. Criticizing the Sangha is 'sinful' (*sdig-pa*), as it disrespects one of the aspects of the Triple Gem, yet many Tibetans seemed to feel that as His Holiness had discussed the problems with monks so openly and so frequently, so could they. Many friends repeated to me 'His words,' about the need for *good* monks, not a large *number* of them. Like the people I spoke with, the Dalai Lama is said to be concerned about the demise in discipline:

> His Holiness has said, hasn't he, that if one does not want to be a monk then one should leave. It is not shameful. 'Get married, do business,' he says. If you are only a monk on the outside [if you just wear the clothes] it is much better for you to leave.

Another man commented, 'When there is a monk who acts badly, he disgraces all Tibetans.' Why the concern here with laziness (productivity's absence), and with quality rather than quantity? As already noted, it has not always been thus, and in fact, Goldstein and Tsarong provocatively argue that before 1959, Tibetan Buddhist 'monasticism was organized precisely as a mass or large-scale phenomenon of world renunciation' (1985:16). After discussing the young age at which boys were traditionally given to monasteries by their families, the few economic alternatives available to these boys should they wish to leave the gompa later in life, and hence the 'emphasis on a "life-long" or "permament" monastic commitment [that] differs markedly from Southeast Asian Buddhism' (*ibid.*), the authors remark on the valuation of monks as ends in themselves:

> There were no exams, etc. which monks or novices had to pass just to remain in the monastery and, to the contrary, even the illiterate and worldly monks were maintained. Being a monk in and of itself was considered spiritually superior to being a laymen [sic] and the 'mass' philosophy of the Tibetan system very clearly placed a high value on recruiting large numbers of monks and retaining them permanently.
>
> (Goldstein and Tsarong 1985: 16)

It would seem that both the Chinese government and Tibetan exiles have taken up modern discourses of productivity, in which merely being a resident of a monastery, wearing the robes and trying to observe the discipline is not enough. Instead, what is required is that one be a particular kind of 'student,' and eventually, hopefully, a scholar or meditator who upholds tradition. Today, especially for the Tibetan government in exile, but also in Tibet itself, having 'good monks' is important both because of their representational power (particularly to outsiders), and because it costs far too much to support huge numbers of 'unproductive' monks. Certainly no one I ever met is nostalgic for the days of monastic-estates, corvee labor requirements or involuntary 'donations' to the gompas.

But to return to the topics introduced at the outset of this chapter, in diaspora there has been heightened anxiety about the fate of the nation and, additionally, with how its essence is represented. Also, the condition of exile has forced some Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, to conclude that if one is not a truly productive monk, a committed monk, there are other ways to labor usefully – for the good of the Tibetan nation. One of the ways to support the nation is reproductively; that is to marry endogamously and raise Tibetan children. This is seen by some Tibetans as patriotic, given the Chinese population policies in their homeland, which are said to include involuntary sterilization and the massive transfer of Han settlers into Tibet.

These conclusions may seem obvious, but their effect may be to undermine an historical practice in which families gave one son if possible to a monastery, so he might produce merit for himself, his family and others. Lhakpa, a Tibetan friend in Seattle, once remarked as proof of his modern-thinking ways 'in the old days I would have had to send at least one of my sons to Sera [as part of a "tax" conscription], but today none of my [four] sons wants to be a monk – how can I force them?' Drolma, who is in her middle forties, criticized many of the monasteries in Bodhanath, and then told me the story of her brother, who at forty-two had become a geshe (an awarded title denoting completion of a rigorous curriculum of Buddhist philosophical studies) at Drepung in South India. What made him a good monk, she insisted, was that he *really* wanted to be a monk. Her brother's path to the gompa was thus far from typical; no one else decided his 'vocation' for him. He entered Drepung at twenty-one or twenty-two after his 'mind turned toward the Dharma' while on pilgrimage with a lama in North India. 'Now he is a geshe, and he has no interest in money.' Drolma's husband, Kelsang, shared her assessment, and told me that he was in a position to judge because he had been a monk himself in Tibet:

> My mother brought me to Sera when I was ten; she had so much faith. My father had left and my uncle was a businessman [who] wanted me to do business too, but my mother and other old people said 'business is no good.' In those days you know, many older people cared only about Dharma. So I went in [to Sera] at ten and left at age twenty and therefore never learned Dharma very well.

Kelsang regretted that he had not learned very much about the Dharma, but like my other shopkeeper friend who had once been a monk, Kelsang felt that the experience continued to have an impact on him, and would in the future too. He was less critical than his wife of the 'monasteries in Nepal' in that he didn't seem to find the monks very different from what he remembered as a young adult. 'Before in Tibet, out of 100 monks at my monastery, ten were bad, twenty to thirty were excellent, and the rest were middling. And these days it is probably still just like that at the good monasteries.'

Like the 'Tibetan' objects that are actually made in Nepal ('Tibetan' ritual objects made by Newars, Tamang-woven 'Tibetan' carpets), the term 'Tibetan monastery' belies the fact that probably two-thirds of the monks in the gompas are not from Tibet itself, but rather Buddhists from northern border regions of Nepal, as well as Newars, Gurungs, Tamangs and some Bhutanese. If there are fewer *Tibetan* monks than there once were in Kathmandu's Tibetan monasteries, it is no doubt partially because some Tibetan parents in the Kathmandu Valley do not want to send their boys to become monks when there are other perceived opportunities (i.e. business ventures, higher education) for them. This attitude speaks to the success of many Tibetan refugee families in Nepal, and indeed, many of the Tibetan monks in Bodhanath entered the gompas in the 1960s, before the effects of the carpet industry or tourism were really felt. These days, the majority of new Tibetan monks are very young, the sons of recently arrived Tibetans or of parents who sent their sons into exile without them. For families that are unable to envision or make bright financial futures possible, the monastery provides not only some education for their boys, but a training in virtue that is capable of being productive over many lifetimes.

Certainly many of the monks in the monasteries of Bodhanath today are not there by 'choice;' their parents decided that they would be monks at age eight or nine and then brought them to the gompa. Even so, just being a monk may not be enough in and of itself today; there are further expectations, both on the part of the wider community and on the part of the boys who become monks. Monks are under scrutiny to be 'good,' studious, decorous (for after all, they are on display); some boys from rural Himalayan areas told me that there was something of a village expectation that they 'come home' when their studies were completed. Having spent their formative years growing up on the outskirts of Kathmandu, it seemed hard for them to imagine returning to a home without roads, without electricity, without everything they had grown accustomed to (see figure 5.1).

Many monks in Nepal are now leaving the gompas when they reach their late teens. My Tibetan language teacher commented:

> Is it surprising they leave? They never wanted to be monks; they see what all of their friends do. They want girlfriends, [to] go to the movies and disco. So they leave. For example, my friend Tashi [left] at eighteen, and then they can't get good jobs – they have it really hard. No good math or English or modern subjects in the gompas, and because they leave the gompa when still quite young, they do not really learn the Dharma very well either. But who can say? … at least they make connections for the future [lifetimes].

Another man gave me a similar opinion. He said that even though there were plenty of 'not very good' monks, still they are monks. And if they leave the gompa, at least they have had that experience, which will certainly be beneficial, both in terms of this life and for future rebirths. Such talk points to an uncertainty about the figure of the monk, an unwillingness to finally say they must be this, or they must be that. In exile, the monk – as the nation itself – stands on the shifting ground between tradition and modernity, and between very different notions of what his labor should produce.

* * *

While some of the Western Buddhist and Tibetan critical comments represented here appear similar at first glance, and indeed, seem to arise from within the same episteme, I venture that this is not entirely the case. Nor is the critique of monks presented in these pages from Bodhanath Tibetans the same as any negative comments about monks that might have been heard on the streets of Lhasa fifty years ago.[25] What has changed is that with Tibet 'lost' (*bod shor*), monks – and perhaps *all* Tibetans – must be productive *and* referential for the nation. Monks may indeed represent Tibet for many foreigners, but signifying the uniquely local is also necessary within the domain of nationalist rhetoric. It is vital to remember the context of Tibetan diaspora in this regard. Monasticism is now capable of being contemplated in a self-conscious way, alongside other imaginable futures and other possible identities. For most Tibetans it seems that monasteries and monasticism retain the very essence of culture as tradition, but that fragile essence – and traditional notions of productivity – can be called into question when confronted with young monks who disfigure what the nation should be. As I noted above, the Tibetan concern with the monk's role as upholder of the Buddhist tradition long predates the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; authoritative Buddhist discourses are replete with references that stress the lineal continuity of the Dharma as maintained *through* the Sangha. The condition of exile brings new force to this concern, overlaying it with a sense of national discontinuity and loss.

But the figure of the Tibetan monk now operates on a global scale, often as a sign of radical alterity that is 'peaceful', 'spiritual,' 'mysterious,' yet still approachable. Their otherness, and their real or imagined qualities, set monks in opposition to a Western rationality described by many Western Buddhists as materialistic or heartless. In this Orientalist logic, the transnational monk figure depends upon his very local, that is 'Tibetan,' flavor all the while that he is in fact detached from his mundane history and contemporary practices. The monk, standing in for Tibet, works as an enchanted sign whose very presence suggests an alternative to the morally bankrupt West. Detached from local (Tibetan) meanings and (re)located within – or against – larger discourses of value, labor and productivity, the monk can even embody ancient wisdom alive within the hyper-modern. Consider a mid-1990's Apple advertisement that featured four robed and hatted monks (from Drepung monastery in India) clustered around a Western man holding a laptop computer with a screen that reads 'The Tradition of Drepung Loseling.'[26] Then in 1998 Apple announced that they would use an image of the Dalai Lama himself as part of their 'Think Different' advertising campaign. These two media examples point to the way that the Tibetan monk can be used to articulate a particular kind of difference when deployed transnationally: the computer as modernity literally reinscribes tradition without compromising it, thus 'humanizing' technology. At the same time there is a representational link between the exoticism of a peaceful monk and a product line. Apple's campaign is of course based on their own primary self-representation as an innovative, alternative company bravely facing its numerous larger competitors with integrity. But should that monk come to stand for something more, particularly by referencing a political and national struggle, then the advertisements may have to be rethought. The *New York Times* reported that Apple removed the Dalai Lama's image from the Asian sector of their campaign; the company spokesperson first claimed that this had to do with the Dalai Lama's lack of recognition in Asia. A follow-up statement, however, made it clear that the reason was fear of offending the Chinese government.[27]

Now all representations of monks – whether Tibetan or metropolitan in origin – take place within a larger transnational field of meanings. Tibetans are very aware that the figure of the monk not only speaks *to* their local traditions, but speaks *of* these traditions to a sometimes receptive world. Despite the Apple campaign noted above, which delinks the monastic from his politicized homeland, the monk might still carry the nation in other representations. The publication of Palden Gyatso's *The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk* (1998) even allows for the possibility that 'the Tibetan monk' might be able to emerge as an individual, rather than a type, as it recounts the story of a 'simple monk' who spent thirty-three years of his life in Chinese prison and labor camps. But even so, the autobiography as a genre that automatically particularizes can also produce a more universal figure. As Judith Shapiro notes in her *New York Times* review, '[Palden Gyatso] has testified not only to the pain of countless individuals but to the devastation of a nation.'[28]

In the next chapter, I consider elements of the constantly reflected upon (yet unwritten) 'autobiographies' of Western Buddhists in Bodhanath.[29] Specifically, I examine Western expatriate reflections on their own identities *qua* Buddhists, and the narratives through which these are recounted. I also take up what might be termed the obverse of individual identity, with all its self-consciousness: is there, and how might we imagine, a Western Buddhist community in Bodhanath?

6 Identifying narratives

A search for Buddhist subjects and communities

Home amidst the strange

> I remember when I first flew in over the mountains [into the Kathmandu Valley] – when we were first landing – I started crying and I was like 'I'm going home' – I definitely felt that way, like 'Oh my God, I'm coming home'. It was a strong feeling – and that first night we went to the Stupa and did some [Buddhist] practice – I don't know how to put it into words. I just remember that night very vividly.
>
> (Peg, March 23, 1994)

Most of my taped interviews began with me asking my interlocutors to tell me when they first came to Nepal – and for some the question also interrogated another inextricably related event: how they 'came to the Dharma.' Before exploring this in more detail, let me point out the irony of the above quotation, and its implications in light of what has already been mentioned in previous chapters. Specifically, 'home' is an essential referent in any discourse of travel, and in contemporary popular discourse of self-discovery too. In addition, the trope of leaving home figures prominently in both canonical and extra-canonical Buddhist narratives, where it represents the beginning of renunciation, and in Tibetan popular narratives, home is the site from which both pilgrimage and exile begin. While the exile looks back with longing, the pilgrim looks forward, to the goal of reaching the place that is not home. In contemporary practices of travel, as Ivy has noted,

> the very idea of leaving home – traveling – to find home has not gone unremarked by those caught up in following the figure of the journey and the ways in which it redoubles the narrative trajectory of the will to knowledge. 'Home' marks the necessary starting point and point of return without which travel is unimaginable.
>
> (Ivy 1995: 30)

But the domesticated 'home,' insofar as it represents the world of attachment and moral stagnation, is *not* a point to ever be returned to in the narrative trajectory of Buddhist soteriology. Peg's commentary above hints at two homes – one that is necessarily left behind in order to discover an even more fundamental home amidst the strange.[1] Ivy writes that the very notion of traveling in order to 'return to origins … sharply foregrounds the contradictions of identity and difference, loss and discovery' (*ibid.*). Such productive contradictions lie at the heart of this and the next chapter, being apparent in the narratives that Western Buddhists used to describe their presence in Bodhanath and their interactions with local Tibetans.

Peg's assertion that she felt she was 'coming home' contains this very tension, but in such a way that (re)discovery and (re)identification are foregrounded, not loss or alienation. 'Home' connotes a place of deep familiarity that contrasts strongly with the assumed foreignness that a place like Kathmandu might hold for an American woman in her middle thirties. Further, to 'come home' conjures an image of a journey completed, a search ended, and I believe, as evidenced by other of her statements, that Peg meant to convey this as well. It is not just that one must leave home to find 'home;' rather there is the additional sense that Peg, and other Western Buddhists I spoke with, have *returned* home to Kathmandu from a place they can now only provisionally call home, their points of departure in the United States or Europe or Australia. Finally, it is not that Kathmandu is literally home, its alterity erased, but in narratives like Peg's Kathmandu is rather a *sign of home* that provokes recognition of an inner Buddhist identity, an ultimate home in the world. Just a few minutes after her initial comments, I asked Peg why she became interested in Buddhism:

> It seems almost like it was *effortless*, it was just kind of *meant to be*. I used to go to a friend's house, a friend that had a Tibetan antique store and I used to go and look at all the paintings, and just be kind of curious, like 'whoa! what's this?' So [I became interested] through the art, and he gave me a mala [Buddhist prayer beads]. And then I went to China and went to a bunch of Chinese temples and Buddhist temples and Taoist temples and it kind of inspired me in <u>some</u> way, I don't know <u>exactly</u> how, but I came home and started to sit and meditate on my own, I had a mala, and read books. I don't know what I was doing exactly, and then I moved to New York and started going to [the Dharma center there] right away – it was Tibetan New Year – and that was my year, it was kind of like that. Right away I did a Nyungne [Tib. intensive purification and fasting practices] weekend retreat and started going to courses almost every day. I didn't go to college, so I was kind of lucky; I had time, and that's what I decided to use my time for. And it was a good introduction. And I just felt like for a long time I had *already* been making up sort of aspiration prayers and like bodhicitta intention and that kind of thing in my mind – so *I already had that in my mind* – it just blended right in. I mean it kind of took away some of my own creativeness about my spirituality when I entered that tradition –

> maybe it was my age, you know when you're seventeen to nineteen, and your own mind creates its way of seeing the world – and that was kind of like a point where that [the creativity] sort of stopped, in some ways … I'm still kind of playing with the whole, you know, trying to figure it out exactly, how to be in it in my own way, and how to take it as its own package.
>
> (Underlining indicates respondent's own spoken emphasis; italics are mine)

Peg presents a straightforward account of how she remembers her initial introduction to Buddhism. But alongside the chronology she includes references to how it felt to her – or perhaps more accurately, how it feels to her upon recollection – and here there are similarities to her initial comments. Peg's remarks that her involvement with Buddhism seemed 'effortless' at first, and that it was 'meant to be' index a sense of familiarity that resonates with her comments about the flight into Kathmandu, where the feeling of recognition brought her to tears.

Subjects are both constructed through acts of travel and sometimes, as we can see for Western Buddhists, it is a keen sense of one's own subjectivity that is the impetus for traveling itself. Contemporary travel interpellates us as national subjects at nearly every international border, thus shoring up the nationalized individual as a taken-for-granted status hardened into an 'identity.' But the Buddhist travelers I met in Nepal also seemed to question the primacy of nationality as they reflected intensely upon something that seemed deeper: a religious identity that perhaps originated in a place (and certainly a time) prior to their birth within a given nation's borders.

Looking back at my interviews, and even more at abundant material gathered from informal conversations with Western Buddhists in Kathmandu, it occurs to me that often, even when I did not ask my interlocutor the question of how they came to be in Nepal, inevitably would come the story – sometimes dramatic, sometimes more matter-of-fact – of how they were introduced to Buddhism. Peg, quoted above, was already a Buddhist when she 'came home' to Kathmandu. A few others, like Sara, had no initial interest in Buddhism *per se*, but after encountering it found that it kept her in Nepal as an expatriate. Conversely too, when I would sometimes ask a traveler what brought them to Nepal, 'I am a Buddhist' was offered in explanation, as if the identity had necessitated the journey.

It wasn't only me that was interested in this question, how one came to be a Buddhist. Indeed, one could sit at the Stupa View Restaurant and hear people at the next table (or even at *all* of the three downstairs tables-with-a-view) telling the story of how they 'met the Dharma,' 'entered the Dharma' or 'came to the Dharma.' One night I went to the Stupa View with Lobsang, a 28-year-old Tibetan friend who had just returned to Kathmandu after receiving his BA in the United States. He was amazed, and couldn't stop laughing, at the fact that virtually everyone around us seemed to be talking about Buddhism. When I brought this up later with my monk friend Gyurme, he thought it obvious: 'Buddhism is what they come here for.'

I came to realize that certain phrases, in common circulation among some

Westerners in Bodhanath, are a translation, perhaps more accurately a migration, of the Tibetan phrases *chos mjal-bachos 'jugs-pa*: to meet or be introduced to the Dharma/to enter into (or follow) the Dharma. Most Westerners who use this phraseology probably take it up effortlessly and unconsciously. Based on observations of Buddhist teaching situations in Kathmandu, I would surmise that these phrases migrate from the Tibetan used by a lama as he teaches to a Western audience, then to his translator, who creates its English form, and then – if the phrase or the concept it describes is especially salient or frequently repeated, it enters the speech of some Western listeners.

Nevertheless, the English term may come to signify practices or concepts that differ from its semantic referents in Tibetan. So while lay Tibetans may use the term *chos-mjal* to refer to any visit to a religious site or religious teacher, for those Western Buddhists who use the equivalent 'meet the Dharma' it connotes that event or events that leads to their *conscious* adoption of a Buddhist identity.[2] The migration of the Tibetan calque into English with a new connotation highlights the context of conversion, i.e. unfamiliarity, an encounter with Buddhism as 'other' (even if, as in the discourse above, it is uncannily familiar too). In short, a usage that would be largely unthinkable for Tibetans. What is important here is that regardless of how many Western Buddhists use these precise phrases, many do present their initial contacts with Buddhism as deeply significant and capable of producing effects. Meeting the Dharma is not only a prerequisite for further development as a Buddhist, it is sometimes remembered as an occurrence or series of occurrences that is the inexorable outcome of a greater logic.

As a Buddhist, then, how does one explain Western people coming from so far away – some of them feeling that the Tibetan Buddhism they are encountering is both strange and familiar – without recourse to the powerful discourses on karma? In my relationship with many of my interlocutors I occupied dual roles: I was an anthropologist when that was foregrounded, especially when I came toting a tape recorder and a loosely arranged set of questions, but I was also a Western Buddhist who sat alongside them in ceremonies and teachings, and who shared a vocabulary that we understood as meaningful. In her discussions with me, Peg alluded to karma as an explanatory device indirectly, but very strongly, when she said that Mahayana Buddhist practices like the making of aspiration prayers (Tib. *smon-lam*) and bodhicitta intention (Tib. *byang-chub-kyi sems-bskyes*; the wish to become enlightened for the sake of all beings) are similar to concepts and practices she had *already* been doing, before her introduction to them *vis-à-vis* formal study in Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, karma *almost* goes without saying. It still must be alluded to, even among us Western Buddhists, because it is not quite second nature for most of us. It is a foreign discourse, making potent truth claims, that is in the process of becoming domesticated, internalized by Western Buddhists. I make this claim not only on the basis of careful observation, but as a result of discussions with an Australian Buddhist nun who has taught many Western Buddhists, and with a Tibetan tulku who has instructed hundreds of Western people in Buddhism. Both said that karma was the hardest thing for Westerners to truly understand; the Tibetan tulku said that

it was this, more than anything, that marked Western Buddhists as different from Tibetans. Ironically, it is the discourse of karma that helps Western Buddhists to understand why the so obviously foreign, i.e. the encounter with Tibetan Buddhism, should feel so very familiar.

Sara, another American expatriate, has lived in Nepal on and off for the last twenty years. She described at great length for me her first trip to Nepal in the early 1980s, when she was about thirty years old. The interview began with me asking her, 'What was your original reason for coming to Nepal?' Her answer was immediate: 'To find my guru!' At this point she laughed, as I said, 'really?' Sara then went on to tell me 'there were really two things' that brought her to Nepal: a desire to do medical work in a developing area and to continue her 'spiritual path.' She noted that:

> I had been reading about Eastern religions, but not very seriously – I mean not from a doctrinal point of view … and at the same time I was thinking about, well, you know I've always wanted to work overseas … I started thinking about where I could go – sort of in line with my spiritual path. It was really just a meeting of paths. One was wanting to do this kind of work and one was just looking for something and I really didn't know; it was very non-specific at the time. But *I just knew I needed to come here* [Kathmandu].

Later in the interview, after detailing how she had made her way to Kathmandu and began taking language classes, she described a very 'intense' massage she got in the tourist part of town which left her feeling 'totally spaced out:'

> And the next day I started crying and I couldn't stop crying for like three hours. And it was because I was looking for my teacher and I was afraid I wasn't going to find them – I had been in Kathmandu a month (laughs) – I was really impatient! And a person who was one of the better Tibetan [language] teachers at school said, 'Just cool out! It'll be okay. If you're supposed to meet him, you'll meet him.' I just couldn't stop crying.

Like many Western Buddhists I spoke with in Bodhanath, Peg and Sara reflected on the events in their lives the only way any of us can, with hindsight. But this is hindsight with a difference, a way of interpreting the past that is already informed by the dominant narratives and tropes of Tibetan Buddhism. One could interpret their comments as conscious attempts to position themselves within a Buddhist discourse, thereby reinforcing their identities as Buddhists. I would argue that this is a primary effect of such narration, but it need hardly be so calculating. Nor is it necessarily unreasonable to explain events by recourse to karma, grace or divine design, any more than it would be to see one's life as a long series of completely random events, caused, if one can call it that, by the mysterious black box known as 'chance.' Without such explanatory frames, life is surely unknowable.

Indeed, some of the Western Buddhist expatriates that I spoke with refused to

speculate on why they came to Nepal, beyond the pragmatic concerns that seemed almost self-evident for them. Gillian, an American expatriate in her late forties, answered my query of 'Why Nepal?' immediately: 'Because of the lamas, because of the teachers.' When I asked how she knew that there were teachers in Nepal that she could meet and study with, she barely elaborated:

> Well, I took refuge with X Rinpoche about fourteen years ago when he was in America, and from then on, all that information wasn't too hard to come by. I was … working, attending [Dharma] centers from time to time in [various parts of California], but I didn't have a lot of time. So all within that first year [of taking refuge] I met [four well-known Tibetan lamas who were traveling or lived in America then] – those were some of my teachers way back then. So it was like – I wanted to be closer, and have more time and availability, and time for meditation, and it intrigued me here – to see what this part of the world was about. And those are questions I can't answer. 'Why?' – you never know why you're attracted to one part of a country or world, you know?

For some Western Buddhists, their attraction and conversion to Buddhism may have been ultimately unknowable but it begged for an explanation. Recall Sara's initial comment to my query about her 'original reason for coming to Nepal'; she replied, 'to find my guru,' and then laughed in an easy and unself-conscious way. In the hour and a half interview that followed she never directly alluded to this statement again, yet it is clear that she meant her initial answer as a sort of final explanation for her presence in Nepal, an explanation that she certainly couldn't prove or document, and that she herself has puzzled over and reflected on. Toward the end of the interview I asked her if she had a 'close relationship with Rinpoche [her teacher].' She replied, 'Yeah, I guess I do; I mean, I do (emphatically). And it's never really made sense to me. I always say to myself, "why me?" ' But Sara also said that from the beginning she had a 'connection' with not only her lama, but his wider family as well:[3]

> that kind of connection has always been there, with the whole family, and sometimes I think it's just circumstantial, but it's not. I know that it really is auspicious coincidence [*bkra-shis rten-'brel*] and it's not just random chance, you know?

Sara's interpretation of the causal origins of her relationship with her teacher are common among Western Buddhists and are ubiquitous in Tibetan religious discourse. My own teacher once joked with me, shook his head with exaggerated sadness and said 'No choice, you know? You are my student and I am your teacher, even we don't want it that way – past connection.' Thus our relationship, our 'connection,' was explained as the result of past actions bearing fruit in the present according to the logic of interdependent origination. In another example, one of my first friends upon my arrival in Bodhanath in 1984 had been

a monk about my own age, Gyurme. In 1994, we went out to dinner, and I had explained my research interests. He then told me that the 'reason' so many Westerners come here is due to past karma and past connection with Tibetan Buddhism. Gyurme opined that many (or even most) Westerners coming over to Bodhanath were Tibetans in the past and had felt great devotion to the Buddha and Dharma. Due to this they had a 'seed' planted, and its result was being reborn as rich Americans who then came to Nepal. He said that many Westerners had told him that when they (first) heard the word 'Tibet' they felt something – even though they knew nothing about Tibet at all.

As Bishop notes, historically there have been many Western travelers who 'presented their accounts as if from the "inside" [of Tibetan society]: they all insisted that somehow they belonged' (1989: 229). Some of them were told by Tibetans that, of course, they had been Tibetan in a previous life. Most interesting for my purposes is Marco Pallis' (1939) statement:

> I felt as if I had escaped from an invisible barrier … I have felt at ease among Tibetans of all ranks as I have not often done elsewhere. *I never felt that I was among strangers; rather it was a return to a long lost home.* A lama, with whom I was intimate, explained this quite simply by saying that it was no accident, but that I showed unmistakable signs of having been a Tibetan myself in a previous existence …
>
> (In Bishop 1989: 229; emphasis mine)

As with Peg's comments at the beginning of the chapter, Pallis feels that he has 'returned home.' It is not my aim to belittle these obviously powerful feelings, indeed, I am forced to recognize similar feelings in myself. While Buddhism provides an explanatory frame for what is usually inchoate, it is interesting to note that the actual feelings might not be so far removed from the experience of many anthropologists who work in widely divergent places. I have heard anthropologists remark how 'at home' they came to feel among 'their' others, or even that their initial forays into the field brought odd feelings of recognition. My aim here is to examine what the effects of such statements and feelings might be. Even as they attempt to create emotive bonds over the gap of difference, claims to similarity and true rapprochement can also lull us into temporarily forgetting the structures of power that continue to operate in such encounters.

As discussed in reference to emanating bodies, the notion of a particular hybrid (externally other while internally or essentially identical) appears in the discourse of Buddhism as a way of dismantling outward, conventional difference. But at the same time, such a notion promotes the differentiation of spiritual others, like the powerfully prescient tulku in comparison to normal human beings. In this context, Buddhist notions of karma and rebirth allow nearly any European or American to appropriate the essence of the other, and thus perhaps claim even deeper knowledge of a Tibetan other as it is domesticated and internalized as one's own self. This discussion must be postponed until the following chapters, where I argue that Buddhism is at once the source of a

de-racialized and de-nationalized imagined community, but also is the site where such forms of difference are re-inscribed.

* * *

Before turning to the communities in and through which Westerners recognize their Buddhist identity, a clarification and caveat are in order. While Gyurme offers an 'explanation' of why Westerners come to Bodhanath, my emphasis is on far more 'conventional' interpretations – *not* explanations. At the same time, my interpretation of Western Buddhist narratives is obviously incomplete. As already emphasized, Western Buddhists, both long-time Nepal residents and short-term visitors, are hardly a homogeneous group (a caveat worth repeating). I did not attempt to document the individual life histories – including previous religious backgrounds, for example – of Westerners drawn to Tibetan Buddhism in Bodhanath. Western Buddhists in Kathmandu provided me with plenty of feedback about what they thought I should be focusing on, what I should not write about, and what anthropological research was meant to delimit and 'explain.' As just one example, an American woman thought I should 'find out' why so many Western Buddhists have Jewish backgrounds. What I think more useful is to examine what exactly such a request presupposes. For while it might be true that there were more than a statistically representational sampling of Jews (a very small religious minority in the USA after all) among the American Buddhists I met in Bodhanath, the few who did speak to me about their 'religious histories' showed a great diversity within the seeming 'community' of Jewry. Some had no religious upbringing at all, two others went through Bar/Bat Mitzvah as more or less 'cultural' events, and I met one who had been raised in an Orthodox home. The notion that there could be *one* reason linked to their Jewishness (or their Roman Catholicism or their Anglican background) that would explain why these few turned to Buddhism is preposterous. To 'fully' document individual cases of conversion and engagement with Tibetan Buddhism would require far different methods and presume radically divergent goals from those I have set out here, and in any case would still yield an incomplete picture of the few individuals selected, to say nothing of other Western Buddhists.

What is important to remark upon is the diversity in terms of religious backgrounds (including those who had 'none,' or whose parents who were actively hostile toward religion) among the people I spoke with. What was far more homogeneous was the racial background ('white') of the North American and European people I spoke to, though in terms of class and levels of education, there was more variety: more than half of my interlocutors had finished (or were finishing) college, and a slight majority gave clues about relatively middle to upper middle class status (by alluding to funds that enabled them to keep traveling or to keep living in Nepal). I attempt to provide readers with enough information about the people that I spoke with so as to provide some sense of their various subject positions; at the same time, I have largely focused on what

these Buddhists themselves foregrounded as their 'reasons' for their journeys to Nepal.

Identifying (with) communities

> Something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount … The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient. It is here that it becomes most visible how imagined communities (Anderson 1983) come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands …
>
> (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9–10)

My discussions with many travelers and expatriates revealed, not surprisingly, a variety of ways in which Kathmandu became first imagined, then realized as a destination or as home. This type of 'adventure' or even 'vacation' travel (let alone travel as pilgrimage), despite its obvious relationship to physical motion, is foremost an imaginative practice. If we think in terms of Peircean semeiosis, in which signs not only 'represent' something else (whether a concept or a physical item *in absentia*) but can also produce effects such as fascination, longing or homesickness, then books, films and other sign-laden popular media are powerful agents in *creating* those specialized consumers known as travelers. I want to understand what happens when a sign – whether it be the 'tulku' or 'lama,' the figure of the 'master' or 'Buddhism,' or even the lofty 'Himalaya' – instigates a habit change in an interpreting consciousness. What happens when the traveler goes in search of that object that was first represented with word-streams and photographs, in books or in conversation?

For some Western Buddhists I spoke with, the allure of trekking in the Himalayas led them first to Nepal and then to their encounters with Tibetan Buddhism via Sherpa 'others' (cf. Adams 1996). This was the case for Simon, an Israeli in his mid-twenties who, like many of his countrymen that I met along the tourist stops in Asia, had finished military service and took to traveling in its wake. We met in 1993 at Kopan monastery, where Simon mentioned that he first encountered Buddhism in the mountains of Nepal; he had been attracted by the beauty of the monasteries and the 'lama-dances' (*'cham*) at Chiwong Gompa in Solu-Khumbu.[4] Simon then made his way to Bodh Gaya in Bihar, and was impressed by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition's (FPMT) work with lepers, among other social welfare projects. On his return to Nepal, having developed a strong distaste for the tourist district of Thamel, he came back up to Kopan (the FPMT 'mother monastery') for his second meditation seminar. Nevertheless, Simon was 'disappointed by Nepal' overall. There

was 'too much Western influence,' and he had such different ideas about what Kathmandu would be like.

Many tourists and Western Buddhists alike told me that it was primarily through reading certain books, or talking with acquaintances who had been 'there,' that they came to form ideas about 'the Himalayas,' and what it might take to actually go there. Some tour books also offer the possibility that one might want to learn more about the Buddhism of Nepal, which is, with few exceptions such as Goenka's Vipassana meditation course, Buddhism taught by Tibetan lamas. Kerry Moran writes in her *Nepal Handbook*, 'ironically, Buddhism is the most popular religion for foreigners to study in the world's only Hindu kingdom. The scene focuses around Vajrayana Buddhism, fueled by the great number of Tibetan refugees who have settled in the Valley' (1991: 209). She then provides interested readers with some background information and possibilities for study. American Sara and a British woman, Yvonne, both mentioned Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* as figuring in the cultivation of their dream to come to the East; several others mentioned Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* and other of his œuvre. If the stock in used bookstores in Kathmandu's Thamel tourist district is any indication, these books are still very widely read, as is Peter Mathiessen's *The Snow Leopard*.

The narrative magic of works like *Siddhartha,* and Anagarika Govinda and Alexandra David-Neel's writings on Tibet created landscapes in which readers could imagine themselves. Such imaginings, while always idiosyncratic, also partake of vocabulary and scenery of images that derive from having read shared texts. So the Himalaya become the locus of an accessible yet secretive spirituality for some readers, who expect to not only find themselves on the 'journey to the East,' but learn more about Buddhism and Hinduism in the process. I asked Yvonne, a British medical practitioner living in India and Nepal since the early 1980s, if she had been reading about Buddhism before she 'hitch-hiked from England through Afghanistan and ended up in Dharamsala' in 1977:

> Oh, before I went to India? I used to go to yoga class and do all those things and read lots of, you know, *Autobiography of a Yogi* – that everybody read – and the Anagarika Govinda books [e.g. *The Way of the White Clouds*] – the same ones that everybody else read in those days (laughs). And if anyone would ask what religion I was I would say 'Buddhist' but I didn't know anything about it (laughs). But I didn't travel to India for that reason, I just wanted to travel and live in Asia for the rest of my life – wasn't with the thought of becoming a Buddhist or anything, it was just part of this whole thing of leaving England and traveling to Asia and never returning to England.

Yvonne explicitly denies that 'becoming a Buddhist' had anything to do with her trip to Asia – unlike many of the Western Buddhists I spoke with – yet she says that if pushed, in those days, about what religion she was, she would say 'Buddhist.' Her desire to get out of England, regardless of the exact destination

in Asia, coupled with her other comments, make clear a thread found throughout a great deal of Western Buddhist, and expatriate, discourses. Travel, and in particular religious travel (journeying in search of meaning to 'meaningful locales') contain a strong element of cultural critique directed at, of course, 'home.' And Buddhism here is not so much Buddhism as a path of practice or even of specific beliefs ('I didn't know anything about it'); for Yvonne, at this point in her life, 'Buddhism' is just the token of the Other.

* * *

Since the time when Yvonne first read about the 'East' via a canon well established by previous 'seekers,' a steadily growing number of authors, many of them Tibetan lamas themselves, have penned or translated authoritative works on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. These books are a different genre from the earlier descriptive narratives by Western participant-observer pilgrims, for they mention very little about high-barren landscapes, exotic customs and 'the Tibetans.' Instead, they present Buddhism as psychology, philosophy and, most importantly, a path to be followed, not so much descriptive as prescriptive. Several of these author-lamas, such as Chökyi Nyima and Thrangu Rinpoches, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, as well as the renowned, late, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, reside at least part of the year in Bodhanath.

These days, then, it isn't only word of mouth or the lure of the generalized spirituality of the East that brings Western Buddhists to Bodhanath. Its particular reputation has advanced as the desire for opportunities to 'study the Dharma' with Tibetan masters grows in North American and Europe. Many Tibetan lamas (or the Buddhist organizations they oversee) now have websites, several national periodicals cater to the nascent 'Buddhist community' in North America, and many of the hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist 'Dharma centers' in the Americas, East Asia, Europe and Australia-New Zealand are linked by newsletters affiliated with their particular sect or tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Such media help construct not only a sense of community through the shared practices of reading about Buddhism, but provide information on how and where one might be able to make an imagined community of Buddhists become actual.[5] This does not mean that an imagined community is pure fancy. 'In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1991 [1983]: 6). Here I want to examine some of the styles in which Buddhist community is imagined in Bodhanath, and what discursive regimes frame these styles.

For some of the Western Buddhists who come to Bodhanath for a few weeks or months, or who pass through while on pilgrimage with their teacher, there is one Buddhist community at home, in Sydney or Rome or Northern California. For some of these people, and for other Westerners without a fixed place in an established Dharma center in Europe or North America, a community also crys-

tallizes in Bodhanath for the duration of their trip, made up of fellow searchers, pilgrims and seminar or meditation course attendees. For many expatriate Western Buddhists in Kathmandu, Bodhanath is the spatial center of their community-home, and their very residence within it is a powerful factor in their own identities as Buddhists. For my purposes here, the expatriate Western Buddhist 'community' was made up of those people who self-identified as Buddhists and lived in Nepal for over two years. It is a subject position taken up by some Western Buddhists themselves, in distinction to the 'tourists,' the 'aid-workers' or 'embassy people' (though these last two categories are not mutually exclusive with being a Buddhist 'expat') and to those Western Buddhists who have come to Kathmandu for just a 'short' time. For myself, as a college sophomore, it was the promise of studying Hinduism and Buddhism as living religions in the shadow of the Himalaya – with all the romance that such a clause can muster – that launched my application to a semester abroad program in Kathmandu in 1984. I discovered that Nepal was in fact filled with other foreign students, social science researchers and expatriates, to say nothing of 'tourists.' In 1993–1994, when the research for this study was underway, students and former students from at least four American educational programs were still very much in evidence in Bodhanath; some of them are in Nepal mainly for the purpose of studying and practicing Buddhism.[6]

There are several important factors that obtain with regards to community consciousness among Western Tibetan Buddhists, and these factors allow for the creative imagination of community at a series of nested levels. Most locally and obviously, there is the sharing of physical space (the basis of face-to-face interaction) and, beyond this, a sense of shared habits and mutually intelligible discourse. Shared practices and discourse are capable of extending far beyond a locale by virtue of being fixed within authoritative texts (and sacred language). As Anderson (1991 [1983]) observed, texts are prerequisites for imagined communities to become even more vividly present (i.e. even easier to imagine) in tandem, of course, with widespread literacy.[7] There is no doubt that the shared experiences of reading Hesse, Govinda and Paramahansa foster a sense of community amongst certain travelers in Kathmandu, while providing, as noted above, a set of narratives about pilgrimage, self-discovery and the 'East'/'West' binary, in which one can imagine oneself. This still heterogeneous community becomes further specialized when new practices – Buddhist meditation, studying with Tibetan teachers – and new epistemological and soteriological discourses (as presented in oral and written accounts by Tibetan lamas) are engaged with.

In the course of my fieldwork, I would casually refer to 'the Western Buddhist community,' and heard others in Kathmandu do likewise, both those who belonged to it, and those who were outsiders. I wondered if I could credibly speak of one community of Western Buddhists in Kathmandu, seeing as they had various teachers who belonged to different sectarian traditions. If we approach communities as created and imagined, adhering and breaking down, at a series of nested levels, then the most personal, and probably most important 'community' in Tibetan Buddhism is focused on the presence of the lama,

around whom a community gathers. I asked Yvonne if she felt there was 'one community of Western Buddhists here' in Kathmandu, half-expecting her to deny that there was anything unitary about it. I knew that her principal teacher was a Gelug lama (not the lamas she mentions below), and assumed that her most immediate community of Western Buddhists would likewise be his disciples and those foreigners involved in his center in Kathmandu. But Yvonne said:

> I feel that there is, strongly, one community … Most of the community live in Bodha and are students of Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche and Urgyen Tulku, and I think that is why it feels like one community. But it definitely, I mean, whenever I talk about other people in the community who are Buddhist, it's always like we're one community … We all feel like it is one community, it's like 'oh the Dharma, they're the Dharma crowd,' it's like that. So I feel quite strongly, also because I know all the people in Bodha and they're friends, it's not like they're strangers.

What Yvonne comments on here is a sense of belonging together as Buddhist expatriates, and as she notes at the end, that is how they are seen by outsiders (most likely expatriates who are not Buddhists), who look at them thinking 'they're the Dharma crowd.' A very few Western Buddhist expatriates told me that the diplomatic and Western professional community in Nepal at times seemed to view 'Buddhists like us' with condescension; others told me emphatically that they had never perceived that, and had even been asked to 'explain Buddhism' to their non-Buddhist co-workers or friends. More pervasive was the sense that we all suffer when non-Buddhists perceive us as flaky, weird or stupid because of the actions of a few – or confuse us with some other religion or even cult group. On one occasion, a Canadian Buddhist friend remarked disdainfully on a procession of 'Hare Krishna' devotees we noticed in Bodhanath (only one of whom was a Westerner), noting that they might be nice enough people, but 'vacant, like they are drugged out by their meditations.'

There is then, a Buddhist community that is defined, of course, in relation to what it is not. But as Yvonne also suggests, there is a form of community more specific to Vajrayana Buddhism that develops around the figure of the guru (and in relation to Tantric deities). As explained by both contemporary Tibetan teachers and the textual tradition, the formation of such a community and the bonds that structure it are based in ritual practices, such as the *tshogs*[8] 'offering feasts' and the 'empowerment' ceremonies (*dbang*) that are still vitally important today. The feast offering practices ideally depend upon the mutual involvement of community members as ritual actors, thus nurturing the sense of a spatially delimited group marked by horizontal (i.e. non-hierarchical) bonds.[9] In an empowerment ceremony, or in a teaching environment, the bonds between disciple and master are vertical, but even so, the shared relation of discipleship under a common teacher unites students as a community. The ritual bonds (which largely fall under the rubric of *dam-tshig* (Skt. samaya), or Tantric pledges) established between disciple and master, and ideally, between fellow disciples in

an empowerment ceremony create an imagined, and morally compelling, community that binds the participants even if they are never to meet again. This 'vajra-bond,' as one American woman termed it, not only links people across regions, but across temporal boundaries (this lifetime) as well.[10]

Thus, even before the internationalization of Tibetan Buddhism it was quite possible to define Tibetan Buddhist communities in terms of both face-to-face and extra-spatial relations as set forth by ritual observances. Where a renowned lama may once have had disciples across entire regions of Tibet, or even across the entire plateau, such disciples would rarely have met and interacted. How might this compare with today's border-crossing lama, who not only has disciples and Dharma centers in far-distant nations, but who also has newsletters, magazines and websites that link these individuals and foster a sense of community for them? One result is Western Buddhists who arrive in Bodhanath with already set itineraries: to re-meet their lama (who passed through their center in Vancouver a year before); to receive teachings from a master who belongs to the sectarian lineage of which they feel a part; to visit the holy sites of India and Nepal with their lama leading the way. Again, whether an identity is articulated in terms of samaya bonds or being vajra-brothers and sisters as per traditional Tantric ritual/moral discourse, or, more commonly, is defined in terms of the traditional lineage affiliations that exist in Tibetan Buddhism, a Western Buddhist identity is nearly always framed by pre-existing Tibetan Buddhist categories.

As with 'karma' and 'auspicious coincidence,' ways of 'thinking identity' migrate from Tibetan contexts onto Western subjectivities. Thus, to give only the most common textual example, all Tibetan Buddhist ritual, teaching, and meditative endeavors (*sgrub-thabs*; Skt. sadhana) begin not only with a recitation of refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but often with a supplication to the glorious forebears of the practitioner's spiritual lineage, and a request for their blessings. Such practice is centered on the notion of a series of literally imagined (visualized) communities, as Daniel Cozort notes:

> Thus one begins the visualization, imagining the field of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and teachers, and declaring that one takes refuge in them, practices with the altruistic intention to highest enlightenment and cultivates the sublime states … with regard to all sentient beings.
>
> (1996: 336)

Plainly, to recite in this way is to be hailed as part of a community that stretches into the past, and is anchored by one's relationship with one's own teacher.

The community centered on the lama seemed most important to many of the Western Buddhists I interviewed in Bodhanath (both expatriate residents and visitors); they referred to the group of people who studied under their teacher as 'my Sangha,' or 'our Sangha' (this Sanskrit term usually refers to the assemblage of monastics, though is sometimes inclusive of all Buddhist practitioners in the Tibetan usage). The migration of the Buddhist term into Western speech points up the possibility that such apparently transparent translation is never simple,

and may render difference (and the problems of transposing radically different notions of subjectivity) opaque. At times, the adoption of Tibetan categories by Western Buddhists, like a sectarian affiliation ('Gelug' or 'Kagyu') or discipleship under a particular teacher, appears to reify Tibetan categories in the service of stabilizing and authorizing specific kinds of Western Buddhist identity.[11] Further, it sometimes seemed to me that Western Buddhist sectarianism had more to do with identity-anxiety among those who were 'new to the Dharma' and hence hyper-conscious of their position *vis-à-vis* Buddhism and other Buddhists; how better to shore up one's new position than with a strong declaration of 'I am a Kagyupa,' for example, to one's fellow Western Buddhists.

Therefore, even though many of my interlocutors' comments alluded to 'community', there was equal concern in such remarks with personal identity. In short, as one's 'self' is confronted, realized and constructed through others, it is clear that in this context of conversion, the obverse of community-consciousness is an abiding concern for the 'personal.' As Western Buddhists arrive in Bodhanath, taking up places in face-to-face and imagined communities, it sometimes seems as if the community exists only as a shadow of the subject's 'identity.' In the context of Buddhist identity claims and the doctrine of no permanent abiding self this is powerful irony, but it is perfectly understandable. How can one begin to practice, to in effect 'become a Buddha,' if one does not know how to be a Buddhist?

Changed communities and fragments of history

Probably numbering just about 100 to 150 people (with fluctuations), many expatriate Buddhists in Kathmandu know each other at least by sight, and often by name. Many are each other's neighbors and work associates; or they belong to the same 'sangha', and/or attend the same parties. Thus they are familiar in ways that visiting Western Buddhists, who often live in hotels, guest houses or other temporary lodgings – are not. As mentioned, there is a distinction made between many expatriate Buddhists themselves and those Western Buddhists who are only temporary visitors, and sometimes even between the long-time Kathmandu dwellers and the more recently settled ones. Claims to difference are useful to examine here for the way in which narratives of personal identity come to invoke community and history. In addition, claims to community and/or narratives of personal history are themselves cross-cut by familiar discourses of nostalgic longing and a concern with authenticity.

I sometimes noted a trace of superiority in the ways that expatriates positioned themselves with regard to visiting Buddhists, though often this seemed to come from the perception that, as my friend Lisa said, 'We are so incredibly fortunate to *live here*, with the Chorten, the teachers, and reminders of the Teaching wherever we look.' Bodhanath, which has already been transformed from a space to a powerful place by Tibetan Buddhist (and Western tourist) discourses, has become home. By association it seems, those who live in Kathmandu, or Bodhanath itself, are fortunate, special and for some of my

interlocutors, slightly superior. This superiority seemed to largely derive from a notion that living in Nepal demonstrates a commitment to the Dharma and one's teacher. This is turn resonated with varied comments from a diverse number of Western Buddhists I spoke with, all of whom used normative Buddhist notions like 'cutting attachment,' 'leaving home' and the importance of 'being near the guru' as ways of not only valorizing the expatriate life, but of critiquing Western 'culture' and life in their former homes. Some of these people were expatriates about to return home, reflecting on what their 'return' would mean for their spiritual lives; other expatriates lamented the lack of commitment among some Western Buddhists now showing up in Nepal; still others were 'short-term' visitors to Bodhanath who pointed out to me the advantages of being able to stay in Nepal, while wondering aloud if they could find a way to manage it.

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a few self-identified Western Buddhists made their homes in the Swayambhunath area alongside a small number of Tibetans – also newcomers – and resident Nepalese farmers. Some of these Buddhist expatriate 'old-timers' still live there; according to two whom I spoke with, Swayambhu was initially attractive because it is where their respective lamas lived. Both have stayed on because the Swayambhu area was still more 'rural' and 'peaceful' than the other center for Western Buddhists in Kathmandu – Bodhanath. Swayambhu is said to have developed less rapidly in the last twenty to thirty years, with less congestion and concomitantly less garbage, lower rents and better air. It might also be noted that the Swayambhu area is much closer to the old center of Kathmandu than is Bodhanath, and in particular is within half-hour walking distance of the old (1960s–1970s) center for budget travelers and 'hippies,' Kathmandu's fabled 'Freak Street.' It was clear that at least a couple of Swayambhu-dwellers (or formerly so) saw mostly differences, not similarities, between themselves and the expatriate Buddhists who lived on the other side of town in Bodhanath (aka 'Bodha'). As Edward, a former Swayambhu resident, characterized the 'new Bodha crowd: Whereas most of them are relative newcomers to Nepal and to Buddhism, most of us have been here twenty or more years. We came with the freaks, and they are more like yuppies.'

Edward enjoyed his take on the social history of the Western Buddhists in Kathmandu, but beyond his slight contempt for what he stereotyped as the privileged 'yuppie Buddhists' of Bodhanath, there wasn't much venom in his words. His main reason for using the term 'yuppie Buddhist' was 'self-explanatory,' he said. In short, he characterized many of the Bodhanath expatriates as wealthy, jetting back and forth between home and Kathmandu, and generally living much as they would at home – with all of its comforts. The 'us' that he identified in exclusion to the 'them' located his community not only spatially, but temporally, and perhaps most importantly, within a nearly moral frame. Nearly every long-time expatriate reflected on their history in Nepal nostalgically: with their arrival there began a decline in the general environment of Kathmandu, as indexed by markers such as decreases in air quality and public safety, and

increases in noise pollution, dirtiness (garbage), rental fees, population levels, violent crime and number of tourists. This discourse of degeneracy plays an important part in nearly all 'adventure' tourism, most especially in regards to areas such as the Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau that have long functioned as markers of purity (outer and inner) in Western traveler's imaginings. Newcomers, it seems, just don't understand how great it *used* to be.

The objective accuracy of such pronouncements is secondary here; what I call attention to are the ways in which a few Western Buddhist expatriates elaborated on their perceptions of a decline in the *religious* environment of Kathmandu in addition to this theme of wider environmental deterioration in the Kathmandu Valley. Such comments, while hardly uniform, tell us something about the changes that have come to Bodhanath as more and more 'foreigners' – a profusion of 'yuppie Buddhists'? – arrive to seek out a teacher or study the Dharma. Some of the long-time Western Buddhist residents of Swayambhu and Bodhanath expressed doubt about the ways in which contemporary Westerners are approaching the study of Buddhism. These new kinds of Buddhists, I was told, 'get their teachings' from Tibetan masters via seminars and arranged classes, and then go home (to the West). Bodhanath in the early 1970s simply lacked the structures that have since made Buddhist teachings more accessible, regimented and organized. The remarks made by long-term Western Buddhist residents of Kathmandu tell us much about how my interlocutors position themselves amidst possible communities: what sort of subject positions are valorized or condemned in their statements, and in what ways difference is constructed. Second, these remarks resonate with the previous discussion of Buddhism as 'culture critique' and the location of 'home.' Lastly, their comments are predicated on particular notions of what constitutes 'Buddhism,' and thus serve as prolegomena for the following chapter.

I spoke with Jean-Paul, a European expatriate who has been living in Kathmandu for almost thirty years, in May of 1993. Like Yvonne, Jean-Paul had come overland, and certainly saw his decision to study Tibetan Buddhism in India (initially) and later, Nepal, as a critique of 'sterile' (his term) forms of knowledge in the West. He, more than anyone that I knew, had seen the changes in Kathmandu's tourist and Western Buddhist populations, and he clearly lamented the urbanizing sprawl that Kathmandu had become by the early 1990s. Yet much as I heard him say (in 1986 and again in 1991) that the pollution, the traffic, the crime rate had risen too far and that he was going to leave, he never did. Jean-Paul said that in the 1970s 'the [Buddhist] scene was much more democratic;' the gulf between 'guru and chela' (i.e. Tibetan teacher and Western student) was not that vast. He noted that Tarik Rinpoche, Dabzang Rinpoche, even Dudjom Rinpoche – who lived in Thamel and had a steady stream of Western disciples staying there with him – were lamas 'you could hang out with and *talk* to.' They were great lamas to be sure, but they were also very involved – or at least living – in the mundane world, and he mentioned that the then Chini Lama was a prime example of this. And Jean-Paul remarked, 'the lamas never had a problem with the freaks,' it was the 'Ph.D. types' who wanted

to ask about 'Mahamudra and Dzogchen [esoteric meditation techniques] *as philosophies* that was hard for the lamas to relate to. The emphasis was on *practice.'*

Jean-Paul contrasted this with the situation in Bodhanath in the early 1990s, in which several Tibetan teachers gave formal instruction to Western students *en masse*, and in a far more institutionalized way. He recognized the advantages of such a situation, telling me how he – and most other serious students of the Dharma – had to learn Tibetan in the early days, because what other choice was there? Today there are several highly accomplished translators (most of whom are Western practitioners themselves) who work with those lamas who teach Western students, and this clearly makes the teachings much more accessible to a broader range of Western people. Yet Jean-Paul regretted the fact that it is rarer these days, and more difficult, for a Western student to get the sort of personal contact with a teacher (the chance to just 'hang out with' them) outside of the institutionalized teaching situation.

I met Neil, another long-term Kathmandu dweller, in the late 1980s. An American, he has lived in Kathmandu almost continuously since then and he had a similar, but even more strongly worded, critique of the situation in Bodhanath today. On the one hand, he told me that Nepal is a place where we search for that magical substance or magical teacher that can utterly transform us. Here, he said, myth and the fantastic live with everyday reality, until the two become mixed together. Westerners can come here, suspend their doubts, and are willing to entertain the notion that they will find their 'wish-fulfilling jewel'. When I wondered aloud if that was really true of most Western Buddhists I knew, Neil replied, 'if they aren't looking for a radical transformation here, what are they looking for?'

On the other hand, he wasn't convinced that most of the people who come to study Buddhism with Tibetan teachers are really able to 'push the limits' of experience as Tantra demands. Neil said that in the monasteries of Bodhanath today – both with regard to monks and (Western) Buddhist seminar attendees – far too much emphasis is placed on intellect and study, and much more should be put on learning experientially. He reminded me that the Indian Tantric masters Naropa and Maitripa had left their seats of learning in order to break out of this exact problem: too much intellectualizing, not enough experience or practice.[12] Later Neil opined that the history of the eighty-four mahasiddhas (Skt. great accomplished adepts) of Indo-Tibetan lore, for example, speaks to us about what Tantric practice calls for. To his mind, their sort of radical, antinomian practice challenges the power of monasteries – perhaps one reason, he thought, why the monasteries and most Tibetan teachers today do not let students pursue a more independent course of Buddhist practice. These were interesting remarks. Here was a Western Buddhist critiquing the current practices of monastic (and other) Buddhist training, what Geoffrey Samuel (1993) might call the 'clerical' aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, with his own interpretation of what Tantric practice *actually* demands.

The validity of his critique is, for me, beside the point. What is significant here is that Neil positioned himself apart from, and slightly superior to, most

other Western Buddhists and the current teaching environment in Bodhanath. It would seem that for Neil, 'authentic' Tantric Buddhism is elsewhere (though perhaps more temporally than spatially). Even so, his critique is still leveled from within the discursive space of Tibetan Buddhism, albeit at the margins.[13] Oral and written text, the hagiographies of Tantric saints who lived nearly a thousand years ago, became a space for imagining a more authentic identity. Indeed, as Neil and several other long-time Kathmandu dwellers told me, there were some Western Buddhists who had taken the lives of the siddhas as literal models for their own behavior. These would include the 'repas' (*ras-pa*; so named because these four Western men wore the white cotton cloth robes of Tibet's most famous Tantric adept, Milarepa), who lived in Kathmandu in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Neil used them as an example of a type of Buddhist identity and experience that at least strove for an authentic approach to Tantric Buddhist spiritual life as he understood it. For other Western Buddhists I spoke with, there were other people that were mentioned as 'model' practitioners: individual Western Buddhists who had quietly completed three-year (or longer) retreats; others who have worked tirelessly as translators and attendants of renowned Tibetan masters; and several who were pointed out to me as exemplary upholders of the monastic life (both monks and nuns).

If Neil, Jean-Paul and Edward felt that the Westerners who came with the 'freaks' have largely given way to a new type of Western Buddhist in Bodhanath, they were also aware that such characterizations are generalizations at best. Despite the fact that certain monasteries in Bodhanath have created seminars and teaching retreats for curious Westerners, it is still the case that for some travelers to Nepal, there is the expectation that Buddhism will provide the 'radical transformation' that they had envisioned. They are looking for distinct and new futures, other lives to model theirs on. It is this that keeps them close to the teachers they sought out, in search of a true home, having left home behind.

I met Heather in 1993 at the Bir restaurant, one of Bodhanath's oldest Western Buddhist hangouts; she had met her first Tibetan teacher five years before, when she was a student on a college year abroad program. Since she felt she had a 'very good connection with Rinpoche,' she was determined to come back to Nepal to live, and to take up further study with him. As she said, there was the matter of enormous student loans to take care of, and while she was working those off she lived in New York, in an area where Tibetan Buddhism was well established. But, she felt she needed to come back to Kathmandu, 'where the teachings are firm.' You have to have a teacher, Heather said, and the teacher at her Dharma center in New York was rarely there. So in 1993, she came back to Kathmandu 'in order to practice' and in order to work with her teacher. She said she didn't 'mean to be critical – especially as you don't ever really know whether people are really practicing or are not – but many [Western Buddhist] people seem to live [in Bodha] much as they do at home.'

What Heather wanted was to be able to '*practice* and not be interrupted all the time,' though she said that some of her expectations were breaking down. She wanted her Tibetan lama to give her a spiritual practice, and she seemed to

think that he would just assign her one based on his insight into her character and personality. But instead he asked her what she wanted, so the situation went 'against [her] vision' of how she had imagined her 'spiritual work' would unfold. When I left Bodhanath nearly a year later, in 1994, Heather had found a new Tibetan teacher, one of the most 'traditional' lamas living in exile, and had begun a three-year retreat in the Himalayan foothills, under his guidance.

Even though most Tibetan lamas in Bodhanath are away from their monasteries – teaching or performing ritual empowerments in Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan and the West – at least as often as they are in Kathmandu, many Western Buddhists come to Nepal because here they believe they can have real access to the teachers in a way not possible in their home countries and in an environment that is more 'conducive to the Dharma.' Gillian also mentioned that it was the lamas' availability, and having more time to pursue meditation and study, that made Kathmandu attractive to her. Peg described her decision to move to Bodhanath as partly work related – in Nepal she and her husband could pursue their dream of opening their own business at the same time that they contributed to Nepalese development and environmental awareness. But for her, the end result of their work would be the time and money to 'just do Dharma; like work our asses off now so we can do retreat and have everything set up for that.'

Many of the short narratives presented in this chapter tell us something about the way in which Western Buddhists in Bodhanath reflect on their initial engagement with Buddhism and on their decision to come to Nepal; that is, how one's life and actions become a meaningful trajectory that can be interpreted in retrospect as *already* Buddhist or moving toward that endpoint. Buddhist discourse on karma aids in this interpretation, of course, by positing the unending nature of cause and effect across lifetimes. The assumption of a Buddhist identity does not come all at once or out of the blue, it is the result of previous propensities that have borne fruit. The comments above display a distinction between what some of my interlocutors clearly saw as their previous (lifetimes') engagement with Buddhism (hence their propensity for it within this lifetime), and their additional, rather emphatic belief that this alone is not quite enough to *be* a Buddhist.

Buddhism, for virtually every Western Buddhist I encountered, is accessed and fully adopted only through *study* and *practice*. This is explicitly directed by Tibetan Buddhist discourse, and parallels the injunction to 'listen, reflect and meditate' (Tib. *nyan-pa*; *bsam-ba*; *bsgom-ba*) as the proper way in which to truly enter the Path. But study and practice are also activities that come readily – and within preexisting discursive regimes – to highly reflective late-twentieth-century Western subjects in search of meaning. In the following chapter I examine the formation of Western Buddhist subjects in the teaching monasteries and centers of Bodhanath through their engagement with 'study' and 'practice.' This necessarily entails careful attention to the place of 'authentic Buddhism' and 'authentic Tibetans' within these frames.

7 Producing (Western) Buddhists

> The thing that's often asked of me [by other Western Buddhists] is 'who's your teacher?,' and when I say I don't have a teacher it's sort of like 'ohhh.' Sort of like, 'you're not part of the flock.' Or … people talking about their teachers and name-dropping [their meetings with famous Tibetan masters] a lot, and you know, I don't really have that … You know I feel that I'm not really part of Buddhism or the Buddhist community in some ways, because I don't have a lama. I don't even know how to *say*, you know, ngöndro [*sngon-'gro*: the 'preliminary' practices of Vajrayana] because I don't do those [practices]. People will talk about all their prostrations and other things that they are doing and I don't have any of that, and I wonder am I really a Buddhist? I've taken refuge, but I'm not doing what everyone else is doing. And I go to teachings and I study. I do my own kind of practice which I guess is different from theirs.
>
> (Kelly, 35-year-old American traveler)

In this chapter, I examine some of the implications of these remarks. Despite her seeming nonchalance, Kelly's quotation here (as well as later comments she made to me over the period of a year) reflects concern about her relationship to Tibetan Buddhism, especially when she compared herself to other Western Buddhists. She had just been traveling in northern India for six months when I met her in Kathmandu; having quit her job teaching English in Japan the previous year, she had come to South Asia to find out more about Buddhism. But could she call herself a Buddhist, and yet not have a principal religious teacher or guru? Kelly imagined herself outside of a community of Westerners who prided themselves on the teachings they had received, and the lamas they had met, even as she later described her involvement in Tibetan Buddhism to me in just those terms.

Sara, another American, though living and working in Kathmandu (introduced in the previous chapter), commented on her sense of certitude: she wanted to 'take refuge [in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha],' and 'become a Buddhist' even though she knew that her 'experienced' Western Buddhist friend would think it odd. After all, Sara told me that she had not read any books, practiced (meditation or mantra recitation or visualizations) or been to a Tibetan lama to hear him expound the Dharma. Surely, Sara seemed to be saying, those

are the things that help one prepare for becoming – or being – a Buddhist through the ritual of 'taking refuge.'

Thus this chapter asks: How is it that Western travelers and expatriates in Nepal understand Buddhism and what it takes to be a Buddhist? What are the media through which Buddhism is presented and Buddhists are produced? I will have much to say about the sites in Bodhanath where Buddhism is performed, as well as the divergent and multiple subject positions open to both Westerners and Tibetans in such performances. From the theoretical vantage of both contemporary anthropology as well as pre-modern Buddhism, it is indeed in performance, in specific actions of body, speech and mind, that our very selves are created.

Tradition, as invoked by Tibetan teachers and by texts, also operates – and is negotiated – at a variety of levels to hail Western subjects as 'Buddhists.' I trace some of the effects of this discursive migration onto Western subjects whereby elite Buddhist concepts and activities like 'study,' 'practice,' and the essential bond between guru and disciple become naturalized as constituting the heart of Tibetan Buddhism. We must critically approach the seeming facticity of 'Buddhism' as a singular and homogeneous entity not least because the very Tibetan Buddhist lamas and venerable scriptures that authorize Western Buddhist subjectivities are unequivocal about the diversity of Buddhist subject positions. This is perhaps most obvious in the frequent textual categorization of Buddhist practitioners as great, middling and lesser (*chen-po*, *'bring*, *chung-ngu*) – each having its own soteriological and epistemic orientation *vis-à-vis* the Dharma. It is no surprise to discover that Western Buddhists are neither 'making their own Buddhism' nor are they merely turning 'Tibetan.' The actualities of what is produced, and how, are the main themes of the next chapters.

Studying the Dharma: self-consciousness and the (un)intelligible

Western Buddhist travelers in Bodhanath aim to enter into the perceived alterity of Tibetan culture's Buddhist essence in order to make it their own. This is accomplished by attending seminars on Buddhist theory and practice, sitting through (and participating in, to various degrees) Vajrayana rituals, as well as visiting and requesting instruction from lamas. For most Western Buddhists, it is a conscious and carefully cultivated endeavor that aims, in short, to make the new familiar, but it need not begin so consciously. Daniel, the 30-year-old Australian traveler I met in Bodhanath in 1993, told me that he had come to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche's seminar two years running. He had been in the travel business, on the small scale, but also mentioned his 'family money' when I wondered how he was able to be on the go so often. When I asked how he became interested in Tibetan Buddhism, he told me how he had some experience with Theravada Buddhist meditation from time spent in a 'Thai forest monastery.' A year or more after this, having returned home, he read in the newspaper that a Tibetan lama was going to be giving a 'public talk' in Sydney and he decided to go. When I asked if he had read anything about Tibetan

Buddhism or knew anything about it previous to the public talk, he was emphatic: 'I knew *nothing* about the Tibetan tradition at all.' Following the general introductory public talk in Sydney, Daniel decided that he would attend the teachings and retreat session that the lama was going to give in a nearby Dharma center.

Daniel made it clear that his initial engagement with Tibetan Buddhism through his meeting with X Rinpoche was not about 'rationally choosing' Vajrayana over the traditions of Theravada Buddhism; Vajrayana Buddhism was simply not understandable at this point for him. In fact, Daniel implied that *had* he been 'studying' it, Tibetan Buddhism would still not have made sense. What did make some sense to him (at least in hindsight) was the presence of this particular Tibetan master, his 'one-pointedness,' especially in the midst of all the elaborate Vajrayana rituals ('empowerments') that the lama gave to his Australian students in the context of the retreat. Daniel said that he 'didn't have any idea what was going on' in the midst of these complex rites, but in particular it was the instruction on meditation given by Rinpoche in the retreat setting that 'hooked' him. While at this same center in Sydney he heard vaguely about the annual seminar given by Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche in Bodhanath, and so when he 'came out to India the next October … it was just purely by chance that the [annual seminar] started the next day.' He also attended teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, by several other lamas in Bodh Gaya, and went to the annual retreat at Kopan monastery near the Bodhanath Chorten as well.

For Western Buddhists engaged in seminars, informal meetings with their teachers and ritual events, the monasteries of Bodhanath are places that through their sheer authentic presence lend credence to the practices of becoming a Buddhist. In this setting Westerners enter a dialogic process, open-ended and reflexive, in which Buddhist normative values, elements of epistemology, and most importantly, Buddhist terminology become part of one's internal dialogue, a dialogue through which a Buddhist identity is fashioned. Like meditating, attending ritual events and undertaking retreats, *reading* about Buddhism furthers a sense of confidence in calling oneself a Buddhist. Thus, Western readers and practitioners enter Buddhist worlds both through their (text-mediated) imagination and by their self-conscious engagement with 'experience.' Western subjects thereby insert themselves into a complex and powerful discursive field that was, at least in pre-1959 Tibet, far less open to reflection than it appears (to Western converts) today. That is, unlike Tibetans in Bodhanath, Western Buddhists enter what is at first perceived as a distinctly 'other' discursive field, arranged and made meaningful according to its own logic. Stan Mumford, making use of Bahktin's approach to discursive dialogism notes that:

> The self is never finalized; it is forever pulled into the 'intersubjective communion between consciousnesses …' By internalizing the voices of others, a hidden internal dialogue develops within each individual consciousness, an argument within the self … The word is the most significant human

> event, as *one fashions one's voice and inner speech by appropriation of the voices of others, which then undergo a retelling, to become 'internally persuasive.'*
>
> (Mumford 1989: 14; emphasis mine)

It is the lure of the other that calls many Westerners to Buddhism (and to Bodhanath), though the voice of that other may have been encountered and even variously internalized through immersion in Buddhist textual discourses already present in the West in translation. But of course, even before such dialogic engagement with Tibetan Buddhism, most Western Buddhists I spoke with seemed, like Daniel, to *expect* its 'strangeness;' a few others, like Peg in the previous chapter, found the other strangely familiar.

But over time, these same people remained extremely conscious of what was still hard to understand about the tradition they had become a part of. This usually provoked private study, attending teachings and retreats, and individual 'practice' – all of which are valorized in texts and by contemporary religious teachers – so that having accepted '[Tibetan] Buddhist' as an identity, the very category itself might now be domesticated and incorporated. In his analysis of Evangelical Christian conversion narratives, Peter Stromberg directs our attention to just what he means by 'identity:'

> Style is a way of doing, and this is precisely how we should think about identity. In fact this analogy is more than an analogy. There is a direct link between style and identity … [I]dentity is precisely a style of self-presentation: style of motion, style of interacting, style of talking. Identity then is a congeries of styles, ways of doing things. Although certainly many aspects of identity are available for articulation, they become so only indirectly … [M]uch of one's identity is not produced intentionally. The skill of having an identity, like many other skills, is a largely tacit and inarticulate one.
>
> (Stromberg 1993: 27)

Stromberg's emphasis on identity as processual and action-oriented ('style') accords with my own observations in Bodhanath. But at the same time, for most Western subjects, 'conversion' to Buddhism entails the necessity of *consciously* (i.e. intentionally) adopting a doubly other identity. While most Westerners are familiar with the notion (even if not the practice) of 'conversion to *another* religion,' this sense of alterity can be compounded when this 'other' religion has been marked by its presence outside 'the West' and linked with a powerfully foreign 'Tibet.' The very notion of conversion in the late twentieth century – with its attendant foregrounding of both self-consciousness and choice – arises in a unique cultural and historical context, one that valorizes the creation of new 'identities' as part of projects of self-actualization (cf. Giddens 1991: 1–9, 32–34).

This raises the question of how 'Tibetanness' comes to be separated from (or even more firmly welded to?) Buddhism: how might the self-conscious Westerner make sense of her identity *qua* Buddhist *vis-à-vis* those Tibetans who live in

Bodhanath and elsewhere? Before investigating the position of the Tibetan Other in discourses of Western Buddhist identity in the following chapter, I focus here on the practices and environments in and through which Western students are *taught* (consciously and not) to be Buddhists.

To say that one has come to Bodhanath to 'study Buddhism' is to take up a particular position with regard to the object of study. It sometimes occurred to me that in conversations in which Western interlocutors defined themselves in this way, it marked a certain purposeful ambiguity. 'Studying Buddhism' could, after all, imply a purely intellectual engagement with it. That is, in cases where a few friends of mine felt they might be judged as 'flaky' by some non-Buddhist Westerners, taking the position of 'student' might be safer than directly stating 'I am a Buddhist.' But while Tibetan teachers and their Western Buddhist disciples praise the benefits of studying the Dharma, 'just study' is characterized as impotent knowledge. Study without practice, without application (particularly in meditation) is basically useless. To be effective, intellectual study must be wed to practical experience.

Thus, in conversations with many Westerners who had come to Bodhanath in search of 'Buddhism,' it became clear that they were looking for experience: a 'new way of being,' a 'spiritual path,' a transformational encounter. By entering into and submitting to the practices and trainings presented by Tibetan teachers, many found that their very beings were transformed. Indeed, Buddhist practices as taught by Tibetan lamas to their students emphatically work on the whole person, an idea conveyed by the Tibetan conception *lus-ngag-sems* (body, speech and mind). Through purifying and transformational exercises this tripartite whole is transmuted (or in some traditions, restored) to the enlightened state, where the body, speech and mind (now honorifically referred to as *sku-gsung-thugs*) are wholly perfected.

But long before these explicitly transformative practices are engaged in, many Westerners approach Buddhism through texts specifically written or translated for a foreign audience. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, some of these books become part of a historically shifting Western travelers' 'canon,' creating the landscape of India, Nepal and Tibet as locations through which wanderers and pilgrims move in search of meaning.[1] A different set of books become key texts recommended by teachers like Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche to neophyte students (see chapter 4), or by Western Buddhists to their friends interested in the Dharma. Sara (who is quoted above) told me that when she first met her teacher, 'everyone [i.e. other Western Buddhist students] was reading *The Torch of Certainty* and *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*.'[2] While some of her Western Buddhist friends found these translations of authoritative Tibetan texts 'so dry,' Sara found them fascinating. Even so, she was perturbed that she would never be able to understand these texts as one should.

Sara, like most of the Western Buddhists I know, expected that finding authoritative texts and studying them was the first rule of learning more about Buddhism. A sense of entering something new, and being unsure of how to proceed, is common to every Westerner who becomes a Buddhist. When one

attends seminars or even informal question and answer sessions with lamas, there are references to doctrines or practices that one has never heard about. For many Western Buddhists, books provide the primary entry into further understanding; indeed, the careful reading of texts is habitual, utterly unremarkable, for most highly literate Westerners.

While this dovetails nicely with indigenous Tibetan valorization of study, and is no doubt reinforced by most Tibetan lamas in their instruction to Westerners, it also can create anxiety for some Western Buddhists. Study as praxis, particularly in the context of Western conversion to Buddhism, creates subject positions that depend upon the intake and processing of information in a quest for assimilation. As we search for stable meanings in a new religious identity that has been consciously taken up, there is the possibility for self-doubt as the meanings proliferate and become difficult to adequately pin down. In addition, there is the lingering sense that reading is not enough. Has one read enough books? How can this understanding be internalized? Can one be a Buddhist if just what constitutes Buddhist practice, philosophy and history is not clear? After Kelly discussed with me a whole series of books as indicative of her changing interests in 'spirituality,' from what might be seen as 'New Age' bestsellers to books on Taoism and then on to Vipassana (Buddhist) meditation, she eventually reached a point where she 'really wanted to do a retreat.'

There is also the concomitant effect that by studying textual representations of Buddhism, texts come to define its parameters. The practices of reading and study themselves are, after all, transformative of both the object and subject of study (not merely a prelude to 'real' hands-on experience); reading-as-study can flatten a dynamic and multiplex Tibetan Buddhism into a seemingly static and knowable entity. Such reifications are especially familiar to anthropologists working in the last two decades, in which critiques of 'culture,' analyses of representational politics, and thus the central anthropological practice of ethnography have been much debated.[3] Scholars in Buddhist studies and history have also begun to examine Western academic practices in their own fields with an aim to situate the production of knowledge about 'Buddhism' within the larger political (largely colonial) discourses that obtained in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some investigations also trace the important effects that 'expert' representations of Buddhism had upon later academic and popular conceptions of Buddhism, though these effects have hardly been uniform.[4]

Most Westerners in Bodhanath appear to have little interest in Western academic discourse about Buddhism, finding it largely irrelevant to their needs. One American woman noted that there was little need to read such academic work as the 'lamas are [accessible] right here' as primary sources of information and to clarify doubts. A Canadian expatriate told me that academics do not have the proper attitude when approaching the Dharma, and that their interpretations might be wrong, which could be very damaging to less knowledgeable readers. Finally, another American woman living in Kathmandu found the academic/practitioner divide slightly dishonest. 'Aren't most of the Buddhist scholars in America Buddhists? Why don't they ever come out and say so?'

Nevertheless, many Western Buddhists do share a common presupposition with some scholars (of yore and) today. This shared orientation privileges the text either directly or secondarily, through placing emphasis on the interpretation of Buddhist elites (lamas), most of whom themselves rely upon a textual corpus as authoritative. Especially in the context of monasticism, tremendous emphasis is put upon, and prestige accrues to, those monks who are involved in serious study, whether it be at the level of entering a shedra (*bshad-grva*) or completing a geshe (*dge-bshes*) 'degree.' And while few Western Buddhists elect to become ordained Sangha, the conscious attitude of study, philosophical investigation and inquiry that characterizes an efficient monastic shedra is partly mirrored in the practices of Western Buddhists at the feet of their Buddhist teachers. This mirroring culminates in the creation of institutes or 'shedras' for lay Western Buddhists interested in intensive study of authoritative texts with learned Tibetan scholars. In 1997, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche provided space, senior Tibetan monk-teachers, and guidance for the establishment of just such an institute at his monastery in Bodhanath.[5] Similarly, the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, HP, India, has a 'Centre for Tibetan Studies' in which qualified lamas teach classes on specific doctrinal points from foundational texts of the Mahayana and Vajrayana.

In this scholastic and 'elite' Buddhist setting, what is often marginalized – if not erased entirely – are the discursive practices of lay Tibetan Buddhists. For both Western students and lay Tibetans in Bodhanath, this marginalization is 'natural' insofar as it is the lamas, i.e. elite religious specialists, who literally embody the authority of the Dharma and are best qualified to teach and interpret it. Still, I want to resist any easy bifurcation between 'lay' and 'elite' Buddhism(s) because such a division does not take into account the multiple positions as *chos-pa* (literally 'Dharma people' or practitioners) that are open to Tibetan Buddhists, and that are explicitly sanctioned by Mahayanist and Vajrayanist discourse. Nevertheless, the position of lay Tibetans within a largely Western imaginary reveals the ideological assumptions at work in identifying and producing Western Buddhists. Lay Tibetans are far too liable to appear as quintessential 'Buddhists,' paragons of religiosity, or alternately as Buddhists in name alone: rote practitioners with no understanding of what they do.

Tradition, scriptural authority and 'authenticity' are invoked – often unreflectively – in Western and elite Tibetan attempts to describe and delimit normative Buddhism, and just what constitutes 'Buddhist' behavior. It is above all the lama, the nodal figure of tradition, who commands the center of Tibetan Buddhist discourse and indeed defines its parameters. Certainly the textual tradition explicitly authorizes this configuration. So while the large number of Tibetan Buddhist texts now written (or translated) in English provide an initial map that orients the Buddhist-to-be, most of the same books point beyond themselves to the lama, the guru, the spiritual friend (*dge-ba'i bshes-gnyen*; Skt. kalyanamitra) who is absolutely indispensable for the successful practice of the Vajrayana (e.g., see Yuthok 1982). These ubiquitous texts also directly address the student, making it inevitable and indeed desirable for Western readers to imagine them-

selves in the role of disciple or student (*slob-ma*; *slob-gnyer-ba*; Skt. chela). Hence the concern that Buddhists like Kelly express about 'not having a teacher.'

Although in the course of our friendship Kelly mentioned at least ten different Tibetan teachers she had met and received instruction from, her sense of lack referred most to the absence of a *singular* teacher with whom she had the sort of transformative relationship idealized in books, and in conversations with other Western Buddhists. While some English-language books merely imply the presence of such a teacher, the figural guru, many others make it plain that without a guru, no one has ever achieved realization.[6]

Some travelers to Nepal might expect that lamas fulfill the same roles for local Tibetans as they do for us Western students of Buddhism, and that most Tibetans are especially lucky when it comes to forging a deep and personal relationship with a chosen guru. Rachel, a German expatriate who had been living in Bodhanath since 1988, explained to me how this assumption of hers had been proved wrong. A young Tibetan woman she knew had been having difficulties with local gossip and other personal problems. When Rachel suggested to the young woman that she 'go and see her tsawe lama [*rtsa-ba'i bla-ma*, 'root guru' or principal teacher],' the woman burst out laughing: 'I don't have a tsawe lama!' Rachel said she had had a similar experience with one of her Tibetan neighbors. She told me that they would talk sometimes, and he knew that she was a Buddhist. But whereas Rachel got up every morning to do her 'practice,' he would put on his running clothes and go for a jog. Rachel noted that 'he really wanted to practice, but he said he had no idea how,' something that she found hard to believe. She told him 'you can read Tibetan, you just need to figure out what sort of practice you want to do – who is your lama?' His reply: 'I don't have one.'

The Western assumption here seems to be that the lama, like the priest, can be confessor-confidant, intercessor, perhaps even psychological counselor, and there is little to indicate that most Tibetan lay people see them in this light. In fact, one of the monk attendants of one of Bodhanath's teaching lamas told me that while there were many good Western students, he also found the comportment of some of them to be ridiculous:

> Even after being here many years, some of them do not understand how to respect Rinpoche. They come [to see him] so much, take up so much time, and ask him before they do anything. They think, 'this is important.' Actually, it is 'I am important,' isn't it? Sometimes they come crying, because [something] bad occurred, for example, their father has died, but sometimes it is because their pet ran away. This is crazy! Rinpoche does not have much time, and Tibetans never act like this. They have respect.

Some Tibetan teachers have spoken or written about the dangers inherent in Western idealization of Tibetan Buddhism and its institutional forms; probably foremost among them is the late Trungpa Rinpoche. In his *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, he directly addresses the notion of the 'guru' and attendant ideas:

> These words [lama, teacher, guru] have acquired meanings and associations in the West which are misleading and which generally add to the confusion around the issue of what it means to study with a spiritual teacher. This is not to say that people in the East understand how to relate to a guru while Westerners do not; the problem is universal …
>
> Most of the people who have come to study with me have done so because they have heard of me personally, of my reputation as a meditation teacher and Tibetan lama. But how many people would have come had we first bumped into each other on the road or met in a restaurant? Very few people would be inspired to study Buddhism and meditation by such a meeting. Rather, people seem to be inspired by the fact that I am a meditation teacher from exotic Tibet, the eleventh reincarnation of the Trungpa Tulku.
>
> (Trungpa 1973: 31, 53)

But even Trungpa Rinpoche, while warning of the dangers of our misconceptions, reminds the reader of the vast importance of working in an 'authentic' way with a true teacher. Both in his writings, and from the perspective of many Western Buddhists, a *personal* relationship with a spiritual teacher is the ideal. When I asked a Canadian man in Bodhanath why he had come to Nepal to study Buddhism when so many lamas now travel and teach abroad, he seemed nonplussed by the obviousness of my query: 'In America the lamas come through maybe once or twice a year if you're lucky. Here they're giving much longer teachings and drupchens [intensive rites] in a traditional way – in a traditional setting.' Tradition and 'context' were also highlighted in the response I got from Greg, a 26-year-old American. He told me that here [in Nepal and India] he can get the *context* as well as the *content* of the teachings, and then mentioned aspects of the physical environment around Bodhanath that added to this 'context': the sound of [Tibetan] horns and the temple rituals, listening to teachings in the gompas, the Stupa and its 'energy' and the palpable devotion of Tibetans. But first and foremost, Greg talked about the presence of the 'monks and Rinpoches.'

Teachers and students in context

In Tibetan Buddhist formulations the role of the lama differs depending on the course of study and practice.[7] Within Mahayana Buddhism, the teacher's relationship to his students is as a revered spiritual friend; within the realm of the Vajrayana, there is increasing emphasis on the lama as more than this. He is the principal reference point that defines how and what and when to practice. The lama is no longer spiritual advisor, but master, 'kinder than the Buddha himself,' and indeed inseparable from the very essence of Buddhahood. Hence, Western students of particular lamas take their master's attitudes and interpretations of Buddhism as the basis of their lives as Buddhists. The Vajrayana teaching environment is particularly based upon the axial relationship between Buddhist guru

(*bla-ma*; lama) and student (*slob-ma*). A popular metaphor for this relationship likens the disciple to a vessel that must be made ready to receive the blessings of the teacher (and through him, of the entire lineage), as well as the essential instructions that he imparts.[8]

For some Western Buddhists the 'authenticity' of a particular lama is not necessarily a given, even if he is Tibetan, in robes, and in a large monastery in Bodhanath. Two expatriate women, whom I interviewed on separate occasions, were particularly concerned that my research might be off track because I was talking to 'the wrong people.' You know, said one Asian-American woman, 'you should meet my teacher. He's the last Mohican.' When I ventured that I had already met her highly esteemed teacher, but I wondered what she meant by 'last Mohican,' she laughed. 'There are very few of them left, the real thing, maybe four or five.' She said that her teacher wouldn't send his monks to the West or even to Hong Kong or Malaysia. He has very 'few Western students,' and he doesn't stay in town or make himself accessible. This echoed the rather self-validating 'concern' raised by the other woman, though they were not speaking about the same lama. The second woman, an expatriate in her fifties, told me during our first meeting that 'you won't find the real teachers if you just go where everyone else is,' and then mentioned that it was too bad that I hadn't been in Kathmandu ten years earlier to meet *her* main teacher who had since passed away. The teacher – and one's access to him or her – become another marker in not-so-subtle spiritual one-upmanship.

Here it is because 'other teachers' seemed to proffer themselves too readily to Western students that their 'authenticity' is called into question. A lama's relative youth, command of English and reputation for having a significant number of Western students may all work against him when he is appraised by those Westerners (and some Tibetans as well) seeking the most 'traditional' of teachers. The irony is that the very people who decry the commodification of religious experience, 'Buddhism,' and indeed particular teachers, utilize and perpetuate the very commodifying logic that disturbs them so. The authentic lama, marked as such by virtue of being outside the commodity-economy of Bodhanath (and hence both 'rare' and 'hard to find'), is the commodity *par excellence*.

The seminars, lectures and even private sessions that are given by Tibetan masters for Western students in Bodhanath often focus on the ways in which Buddhist doctrine can be internalized, or 'accomplished' (*sgrub-pa*) through meditation practice; they also explicitly address the necessity of obtaining a spiritual guide, without whom progress on the Path is deemed impossible. Most formal teachings begin with the lama instructing and exhorting the audience on how to listen to the instruction he is about to give. First, to have the proper motivation for receiving the teaching, and then to 'listen, contemplate and put into practice what is being taught;' indeed, these are taken as injunctions with a necessary and practical order.

Lay Tibetans were largely absent from these teaching situations in Bodhanath. The lama always had a monk attendant or two on hand, and occasionally, in the situations that I observed, a few other Tibetan monks or nuns

might also be in attendance, listening carefully to the lama's teaching. But in the main, it is Westerners who form the bulk of the audience. And indeed, it is the Western Buddhists in Bodhanath, especially those who are in town for a few weeks or more often months, who spend much of their time 'receiving teachings' or talking about 'receiving teachings' from various Tibetan masters. What does this tell us about the differing orientations of Tibetan and Western Buddhists?

Daniel referred to the sites where Tibetan lamas were either temporarily or more permanently in residence (Dharmasala, Bodhanath, Bodh Gaya and the Darjeeling area), together with the Western people who followed the teachers there, as the 'Dharma circuit.' When I had asked how he knew who was teaching where and when, he said, 'I've never known networking like it. It's worse than media people. I found out about it [a particular Buddhist teaching event] this year on-line, while I was in Europe.' He also commented:

> It can fill your time – you can fill your time, just going from one [Buddhist] course to the other, like I do! (laughs) After a while, doing these courses, there is a circuit, it is a kind of trip, and that's a bit strange. Because unless you get on the circuit, you're really quite unaware of it. You could be in Kathmandu and never come out to Bodhanath.

While Tibetan lay people often gather in Bodhanath to receive blessings from their lamas and to attend ritual performances, occasions on which Tibetan scholar-monks or tulkus teach to a lay Tibetan audience are not common. This is not to say that it never occurs: perhaps the most famous example would be the New Year (*lo-gsar*) address that the Fourteenth Dalai Lama makes to the Tibetan people from his seat in Dharamsala, in which he teaches the Dharma and offers advice to Tibetans for the coming year. The Dalai Lama has also given structured religious discourses commenting on the 'stages of the path' (*lam-rim*) or the 'bodhisattva's way of life' (*byang-chub sems-dpa'i spyod-'jug*) – often in conjunction with ritual empowerment ceremonies – to Tibetan and foreign lay and monastic audiences in Dharamsala and internationally.' Certainly other lamas teach Tibetan lay people in their communities as well. In December of 1993, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche gave instruction on phowa (*'pho-ba*) practice over a period of several days to well over a hundred lay Nepalese (and some Tibetans) at his hermitage in Yangleshö, and apparently Akong Tulku gave similar instructions to a large group of Tibetan lay people in Bodhanath in the previous year.[10] Yet in general, the explicit teaching and study environment characterized by seminars, classes, and informal gatherings – taught by Tibetan masters and directed at Western Buddhists – has no parallel for Tibetan lay people. These 'teachings' have become gradually more numerous and much more institutionalized since my first trip to Kathmandu in 1984.

The actual schedules for the various 'teachings' in Bodhanath vary considerably, but most follow a basic pattern. Participants are registered (sometimes well in advance of the actual event) and fees collected by Western disciples of the Tibetan lama who will be expounding the Dharma. Kopan's annual month-long

'retreat' focuses on Dharma discourses by Tibetan lamas and their senior Western disciples, but also encourages meditation practice and personal study. For this reason, participants live together, usually in monastery 'dorm' rooms or in tents set up on the monastery grounds. The shorter 'seminars' by Tulku Chökyi Nyima and Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoches, which generally last from two to three weeks, incorporate optional meditation practice before the actual teaching begins, and are non-residential; participants take care of their own room and board as they see fit. In these seminars, teaching generally lasts for two to five hours per day, with the lama often following a particular text or texts upon which his daily discourse in based.

* * *

For example, in January of 1993, Thrangu Rinpoche taught on the 'King of Samadhi Sutra' (Skt. Samadhirajasutra) for ten days, followed by a few days of teaching on the life of the second Karmapa (Kar-ma pak-shi, 1204–1283) and then another week devoted to the Mahamudra Songs of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye ('Jam-mgon Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha'-yas; 1813–1899). There were approximately sixty Westerners present, five or six Chinese from Hong Kong, a few Newari men, and three Tibetan tulkus in their teens and twenties. As many as half of the Western participants had come to Bodhanath specifically for this, the 'seventh annual Namobuddha seminar,' while the others were a mixture of long-term expatriates and other Western Buddhists who were already in Nepal and had heard about the teaching. The fee for the seminar was NRs. 1,200 (approximately $24), and though it was never announced publicly, the woman who sat at the entrance to the teaching room assured one person that 'no one will be turned away for lack of money.'

Before Thrangu Rinpoche began to teach in the shrine room on the upper level of his gompa, there was an optional meditation session held each day beginning at 9:00 a.m. There were announcements initially at the start of the seminar to see if anyone wanted introductory meditation instruction (from senior Western students) and there were perhaps three people who raised their hands. During the meditation in the shrine room people pursued their own practices: most silently sitting, but one continuously saying mantra just under her breath. While a third of the participants initially took part in the meditation sessions, by the third week into the seminar, far fewer people attended.

Upon entering the shrine room, participants made the standard Tibetan triple prostration in the direction of the main image or toward Rinpoche's empty throne. People sat on a wide variety of cushions on the floor: some were square and ringed-round with Tibetan-style colored cloth, but most others were far more makeshift: blankets, camping pads, jackets/sweaters, bed and/or back pillows. A handful of people sat on chairs along the back wall of the shrine room as well. There was a public address system set up to amplify both Rinpoche and his very experienced translator; a few other people, including one of the young tulkus, set up their own microphones and tape recorders too.

While some of the participants meditated from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m, Thrangu Rinpoche had private interviews in his chambers with individuals who had previously scheduled appointments through his American secretary. Following this he came into the shrine room and everyone rose. People put their hands together at their breasts and bowed their heads as Rinpoche entered. He was followed by the three younger tulkus. Once Thrangu Rinpoche sat on his throne, we began our triple prostrations, and immediately after this, Rinpoche led us in the prayer of devotion to the Kagyu lineage. Most people followed this on the printed sheets that were distributed the first day, although a few seemed to know it by heart. Then Rinpoche would commence teaching. This usually started around 10:15 a.m, and Rinpoche usually ended his teaching at approximately 11:30.[11] Often he would ask for questions, and take them for ten or fifteen minutes; on a few occasions he apologized that there was no time.

On the first day of his seminar, Thrangu Rinpoche reminded participants of the proper attitude and motivation to cultivate when listening to the Dharma. To paraphrase, he noted that we should first see ourselves as sick, and then realize that unless we do something we will remain sick in the future. Second, we must search for and find the perfect cure: the perfect and sublime Dharma. The third and fourth notions we should keep in mind are that of the doctor and the cure. The teacher (or Buddha) alone as the physician can tell us how much and what type of medicine we should take; the more we practice, the more we are sure to be cured.

Having never heard Thrangu Rinpoche teach before, I was impressed by his extremely clear exposition on (what were to me) difficult topics; he skillfully wove in references, similes and examples from the Sutras, Tantras and from his own life both in Tibet and now as a traveler in exile, in order to make his points. Despite his tremendous learning and great responsibilities (as head abbot of his lineage's largest and most prestigious shedra, among other duties), Thrangu Rinpoche is humble in a matter-of-fact way. If I have emphasized the importance of intellectual study, conscious reflection and 'practice' in the lives of Western Buddhists, and have perhaps made this seminar appear quite 'dry,' it is also vital to remind the reader of the genuine affection, even deep devotion that many of the Western students who come to Bodhanath feel for their teachers. As one of the seminar attendees said to me of Thrangu Rinpoche:

> he may not be so flashy, but he is so obviously *aware*. I have never been so sure of who my teacher is, exactly, but now if you asked me I would say [Thrangu Rinpoche] is … I trust him completely … there aren't any games.

Becoming a Buddhist: a moment of origin?

For most Western students of Buddhism, as well as their Tibetan teachers, the defining moment of 'becoming a Buddhist' may be traced to the repetition of the Triple Refuge Vow, by which one 'takes refuge' in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha against the sufferings of samsara.[12] This formula is well known to

Buddhists in all societies, but in elite Tibetan Buddhist discourses today (reproduced by Western disciples) these 'refuges' are seen as *interior*, in distinction to a notion of exterior protector deities or a creator god. In fact, this is the common contemporary interpretation given by Tibetan masters and Western Buddhists when the Tibetan term for 'Buddhist' (*nang-pa'i chos-pa*) is unpacked, so that it is explained to mean 'one who follows the inner Dharma.' In everyday Tibetan speech it is often shortened to *nang-pa*, an 'insider,' perhaps signifying an inclusive 'one of us'-type identity; alternatively, it can refer to an inner or inward person, which again can signify the Buddhist orientation toward inner processes, rather than seeking external answers to existential or ontological questions.

It is possible that this particular emphasis on interiority of process, rather than on a basically oppositional connotation, i.e. us (insider) Buddhists as opposed to those (outsider) Hindus and Muslims, is fairly recent, and demands further historical and textual research. Today, a generic Tibetan term for non-Buddhist is 'chi-pa' (*phyi-pa*) or 'outer person.' Not only could it be interpreted to refer to the concern of such people with forces 'outside' of oneself (eternal God or gods, and presumably materialist atheists as well), but it can also mean an 'outsider' in social terms as well (i.e. 'not like us insiders'). In any case, most Tibetan lay people I spoke with told me that the term *nang-pa* merely meant someone with faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Most Western Buddhists, however, interpreted the term's significance as above: denoting the primacy of interiority.

In his English commentary on a popular Tibetan text outlining the main points for Buddhist practice, Tulku Thondup writes:

> Refuge is the foundation stone of all Dharma practice … In brief, the obligations of taking Refuge are never to seek protection in any worldly gods or material goals, this being counter to the refuge in *Buddha*; never to harm sentient beings, which is counter to the Truth of *Dharma*; and never to associate with people of perverted views and behaviour, this being counter to refuge in the *Sangha*.
>
> (1982: 44, 48)

All of the Western Buddhists I interviewed were aware of the Tibetan term for 'Buddhist' and some also discussed their identity as 'inner people' *vis-à-vis* non-Buddhist 'others' (as a broad interpretation of Tulku Thondup's final comment above – 'people of perverted views and behavior' – might indicate). Thus taking refuge was not only the origin of a new 'inward' (*nang-pa*) identity but could also yield a sense of being an 'insider' (*nang-pa*), i.e. one in the know, thus sharing a bond with Tibetans that all other Western Others lacked. While many of the more religiously educated lay Tibetans that I knew might have reproduced Tulku Thondup's comments above if asked to discuss the meaning of 'refuge' and 'being a Buddhist,' most Westerners went one step further than a rejection of material or external refuges. For them, being a Buddhist seemed to mean turning the gaze within. I do not mean to imply that this sort of interpretation is 'wrong,'

in fact, it seems to accord with contemporary Tibetan elites' exegeses. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that the elite Tibetan and Western Buddhist interpretations are *identical*, given the long Western engagement with psychotherapies, Christian religious doctrines and literary genres in which an interior self is posited as knowable and recuperable. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In 1993, I conducted an interview with Hans, a German in his mid-forties, who had been involved in the international diplomatic community in Kathmandu for a number of years. We first discussed what it meant to be a Buddhist; I later became aware that this explicitly self-reflective question was a monthly feature in *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* (the Buddhist journal with the widest circulation in North America).[13] My question to Hans was open-ended (italics are my emphasis):

PM: What does it mean to be a Buddhist?

H: (*Silence*)

PM: I mean, do you call yourself a Buddhist? If someone asked you, 'Are you a Buddhist,' what would you say?

H: I would say 'yes.' I would say 'yes.' But you know, the Tibetans don't call themselves 'Buddhists,' they call themselves 'nang-pas' – so I usually, when I'm talking to people, I say 'you know this name "Buddhist" comes from Western' – Tibetans don't even use the word. *They say 'nang-pa,' which is 'one who looks inside.'* And I would say that that is more how I would say what my practice is. You know, looking inside for the answers rather than outside all the time. And becoming more – having more faith and reliance on that – what's inside. Listening to that and being aware of … that. Paying attention. That is sort of what it means to me. I – well, you know, it means a lot. It means a lot.

For some Western Buddhists like Hans, the term 'Buddhist' is itself problematic, merely by being a 'label.' One implication might be that as a referent, the term itself could be misunderstood to point to an actual entity (a Buddhist) that truly exists in the world. Hans and I had sat at the feet of the same Tibetan lamas, hearing discourses on Buddhist epistemology and ontology that were peppered with references to the inherent absence of *anything* despite its collectively agreed-upon label, so such a reaction from him was almost expected. In response to my question, Hans then offers the Tibetan term 'nang-pa,' preferable perhaps because of its indigenous origin, but additionally because it refers to an orientation in his own spiritual *practice*.

Beyond the label 'Buddhist' and over and above the 'inner orientation' (nang-pa) that is based on an understanding of the Refuge vow, there was, for many Western Buddhists I spoke with, a moment when their Buddhist identity became actualized. This moment was the refuge *ceremony*, in which one recites the prayer of going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, before a teacher visualized as the actual Buddha himself; this marked the beginning of their lives as

Buddhists. I have seen this ceremony numerous times, given to Western individuals and to small groups, both in Seattle and in Kathmandu. It is quite common for Tibetan teachers to perform the ceremony following teachings they have given. The ceremony involves comparatively little in the way of ritual, save for the lama's intonation of the refuge prayer (in Sanskrit in some cases, in Tibetan in others I have witnessed) and the petitioner's repetition of these words. The lama then takes a small bit of hair from the top of the petitioner's head and cuts it off, symbolizing, I was told, the giving up of worldly ways. Each person then receives a new (Tibetan) name that again marks the transition to a new way of living, and a new identity.

Very few lay Tibetans ever seem to go through this ceremony. This does not mean that Tibetans do not 'take refuge.' Indeed, for some of the Tibetan lay people I spoke with, it was the taking of refuge (or 'having great faith') in the Three Jewels that was first mentioned in the context of what it meant to be a Buddhist. While the 'refuge formula' is well known to most Tibetans and much repeated (it is invoked at the start of all Buddhist rituals and texts, in both abbreviated and extensive Vajrayana forms), the ceremony that Western Buddhists take part in seems to be derived in part from the ceremonies for a novice monk (i.e. the hair-cutting and the adoption of a new name).[14] When I asked one middle-aged Tibetan man about the refuge ceremony (*cho-ga*), he was at first confused. 'Refuge?' he said. He then recited the triple refuge 'formula' for me.[15] When I finally clarified that I meant a ritual, a ceremony, something that Western Buddhists do *to become a Buddhist*, he told me: 'Oh, I see. We Tibetans are Buddhists [already]. We do not need to do this.'

As with the self-conscious attitude toward study aimed at making the strange familiar (or at least understandable), self-consciousness predominates in the Westerner's decision to take refuge. For some who were 'interested in Buddhism,' 'studying Buddhism' at Kopan monastery, or who were attending Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche's annual seminar, 'taking refuge' was not something to be entered into lightly. Doubts have to be weighed, problems with 'traditional religions' considered, and finally, as for Daniel, the time, place and most importantly the teacher conducting the ceremony had to be 'right.' After more than a year of weighing his options, he took refuge with a tulku he respected at the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, the place renowned as the seat of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Not everyone I met decided to take refuge in the end. Simon, the Israeli in his mid-twenties whom I'd met at Kopan monastery, had undergone several retreats there. But he told me that he was 'not a Buddhist and [had] not taken refuge.' In fact, he found it 'ridiculous' that so many people at the Kopan meditation seminars do take refuge afterwards. When I asked why, Simon told me that 'most people know nothing' about Buddhism but become excited about it – 'they want to call themselves "Buddhist" to be different.' Still, he said he was very interested in Buddhism or he would not be there at Kopan; for him the greatest problem was all the Tibetan ritual, since he said that he had enough of that in Judaism at home.

Accomplished Buddhists: ritual practices and positions of difference

Empowerment

Having discussed the teaching environment and the explicit religious discourse given by the master to his disciples, it may be useful to distinguish between the other public and semi-public roles that a lama, especially a tulku, might play. If Tibetan laity seldom appear in contexts where religious teachings are given to Western students of Buddhism, we must consider the principal public arenas in which the Tibetan lay public can access (directly or indirectly) the lamas, and most importantly the lamas' spiritual power, outside of a private or semi-private audience in the lama's receiving room. Does the figure of the tulku, and especially in his relational role as lama/guru, occupy different locations within the Buddhist worlds of Tibetans and Westerners? Vajrayana Buddhism offers a panoply of rituals aimed at diverse ends, but my aim here is to sketch the role of the lama, and his interactions with lay and monastic disciples in such an arena.[16]

Simply put, the ceremonies that a lama performs are loosely divided by their means and ends: aimed at enrichment (both material and spiritual), averting negative forces, pacifying local deities and praising enlightened beings (Dorje and Kapstein 1991: 136–137; Snellgrove 1987: 238). These ceremonials usually occur within the main temple (lhakhang) of the gompa, or on monastery grounds. Sometimes these may be undertaken for a particular patron (or for the benefit of the sick or deceased); the larger, more public performances are for the benefit of the community in general, for the monastery itself, and always for the greater, if less immediate, benefit of all sentient beings. Communal activities like this that I witnessed in Bodhanath include the rituals accompanied by monastic dance (*'cham*); the presentation and ritual burning of offerings in a straw and wood pyre (*gtor-rgyab*); and in a different vein, the performance of mantra recitation (*chos-don*; *kha-don*) by a gathered public, led by esteemed lamas or a tulku. The monastic dances and great burnt offerings are most certainly identified as 'spectacle' (*ltad-mo*) by the public which turns out to watch them, while the latter, revolving around the recitation of mantra by assembled people, is ideally performative; there are no 'mere on-lookers' *per se*.[17]

In addition to other rites of propitiation, benediction and suppression (of negative forces), lamas also perform ceremonies aimed at the 'accomplishment' of Tantric deities. Indeed, there is no clear demarcation between rites of propitiation, suppression and so forth – with their clearly instrumental ends – and action aimed at so-called 'higher' ends of meditative realization.[18] Tantric practice assumes that the embodiment of deities by specialist participants (such as a presiding tulku and assembled monks) in a ritual context is in fact what allows for the seemingly pragmatic ends of such action. This seeming difference in the *aims* of 'Buddhist' activity has been much remarked upon by anthropologists working in Burma, Sri Lanka and in Tibet; it is usually discussed with reference to the orientations that different Buddhist subjects (e.g., monastics and laity) have

toward religious praxis.[19] What I want to re-emphasize here is that according to elite Tibetan religious discourses, ritual practices may be interpreted from a number of different levels. Further, it is assumed that subjects within a ritual environment could occupy very different positions based on their levels of understanding, and even more importantly on their motivations for attending the rite.[20] In the examination of the empowerment (*dbang;* wang) and drupchen (*sgrub-chen*) rituals below I examine these positions, especially as they are emblematic of the discourses and practices that help fashion a 'Western Buddhist.'

* * *

Senior lamas – again, most often tulkus – enact a related type of ritual performance that is of particular interest to Western Buddhists in Bodhanath, the Tantric 'initiation' or 'empowerment' (wang).[21] As Beyer notes:

> Tibetans themselves often use the term 'initiation' [dbang] to refer indiscriminately to both permission [to undertake the ritual service of a deity] and initiation proper … On its most basic level, permission is simply the empowerment of one's body, speech and mind (and often one's qualities and function) … In other words, the permission consists essentially in making the recipient's body, speech and mind pure and strong enough to practice the rituals of the particular deity, to visualize his body, recite his mantra, and contemplate his meditation – to gain all the magical powers that accrue to the self-generation [of oneself as the deity] … But the empowerment thus bestowed by the initiating lama is of benefit even beyond its authorization to practice, and many Tibetans avidly collect initiations (with the intensity with which many Westerners collect stamps), seeking not only the rare and ultimately precious great initiations but also the empowering permissions of as many deities as possible.
>
> (1988 [1973]: 402–403)

Here I generally retain empowerment as a term to cover what Beyer lists as 'great initiations' as well as the authorizing 'permission' that is ritually given by lamas for a host of other deities. Preparations for such empowerments range from relatively minor to extremely complex, with requisite oblations of symbolic substances, ritual music and more, depending on the nature of the deity or deities whose practices are being transmitted. Nevertheless, all such rites involve the ritual master's (*rdo-rje slob-dpon*; Skt. vajracarya) mental generation of himself as the principal deity and his disciples' visualization of him as such. The empowerment rite is generally accompanied by spoken recitation (*lung*) of the practice text(s) (*sgrub-thabs*; Skt. sadhana) that the initiates are being 'empowered' to perform.[22] For most Western Buddhists that I met in Bodhanath, the wang is of vital importance for the 'permission' and ritual strengthening that it provides to one who wishes to undertake the meditative practices associated with the given deity. Many wang are performed for very small groups of both monastic and lay

adepts in private, yet empowerment ceremonies are also sometimes performed for huge gatherings, such as the *Dus 'khor dbang chen* (Skt. Kalacakra) or the enormous cycle of empowerments given by the Sakya Trizin over a period of months in Bodhanath in 1994 (see below).

Because of the enormous emphasis that Western Buddhists and their Tibetan teachers place upon 'practice,' it is hardly surprising that in Bodhanath it is predominantly Westerners who now seem to 'avidly collect initiations' like 'postage stamps.' Without an initiation, or ritual permission, it is not deemed possible to actually practice any meditation associated with a particular deity. A non-Buddhist American friend of mine who stayed with me in Bodhanath remarked that she found it difficult to proceed conversationally in environments like the Lotus Guest House or the Stupa View restaurant; for her, conversation seemed characterized by 'name that Rinpoche,' allusions to this or that monastery, and queries as to whether or not she would be going to the empowerment. Nearly everyone she met was a Western Buddhist and assumed she was too. This identity is constituted first and foremost by virtue of a specific discourse that interlocutors share as meaningful, and that appears opaque or even obviously self-referential to 'outsiders' like my American friend. The very reference to particular lamas and specific practices as part of one's experience does more than merely mark oneself as Buddhist (in conjunction with some and in difference from others); it actually creates one as 'a Buddhist.' As Stromberg writes in *Language and Self-Transformation*:

> The way to look at … conversion, I have come to see, is not as something that occurred in the past and is now told about in the conversion narrative. Rather the conversion narrative itself is a central element of the conversion … [I]t is through language that the conversion occurred in the first place and also through language that the conversion is now re-lived as the convert tells his tale.
>
> (1993: 3)

While many Western Buddhists might be introduced rather slowly to the idea of an empowerment, perhaps first through a text, this is not necessarily the case for all. Daniel, the Australian Buddhist introduced above, explained that his first contact with Tibetan Buddhism was 'a heap of empowerments' that were given by X Rinpoche following his public talk in Sydney. Kelly also became introduced to Tibetan Buddhism through a seminar of sorts, followed by an empowerment ritual and then more instruction. Neither set out to receive a Tibetan Buddhist empowerment; as they explained, it was something that happened to them in the context of meeting with a Tibetan teacher, and indeed was one of the first things they took part in within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. At this juncture, the empowerment ceremonial itself, with its array of symbolic action, ritual implements and litany in Tibetan, was simply not understandable. Learning how to read the ritual is something that Westerners (and the vast majority of Tibetans too, if so inclined) must consciously embark on, and for this they turn to the

authorities: their spiritual teachers, their fellow Western Buddhists and texts. When I asked Kelly if she was able to make sense of what she experienced at her first meeting with Tibetan Buddhism (she had already encountered Theravada Buddhism), at 'the Root Institute in Bodh Gaya' she replied:

> I ended up attaching myself to people who had, like this one nun from California and this other man from New Zealand, people who knew a lot about Buddhism. They had spent a lot of time, and so I was able to ask them a lot of questions. I then got to be friends with another guy who'd been in Asia for three years studying Buddhism.

One of the first things one seems to learn about empowerments, as I did when I first encountered them in Nepal in 1984, was that Western and Tibetan Buddhists made a distinction about how one approaches them. That is, more experienced Western Buddhists asked whether I meant to receive an empowerment in order 'to practice' the meditational exercises associated with its central deity, or whether I was planning on receiving it 'just for the blessings' that the empowerment ritual would impart.[23] Is the empowerment a means to an end, or is it an end in itself? For apart from 'authorizing' ritual attendees to take up sadhana practices that aim to 'accomplish' a particular deity, wang and lung are also ritual events which also impart a great benediction (*byin-rlabs*), and as such they are often attended by many Tibetan lay people (and Western devotees, to a lesser degree) who have no intention of undertaking the practices involved with the deity(s) that the rite focuses on.

This was the case with the empowerments bestowed by the throne holder (*khri-'dzin*, Trizin) of the Sakya lineage in Bodhanath from December 1993 to March 1994. According to an Argentine woman I spoke with, who was going to 'receive the blessings,' there were approximately six hundred separate empowerments being given over a three-month period. When I spoke with her in late January 1994, she said that there were twenty to thirty Westerners in attendance daily and hundreds of Tibetan monks and laity. She told me that a khenpo (monastic scholar or abbot) had been 'translating' the proceedings in English each day over a radio band, giving commentary on the activities, describing what people should visualize at the various points in the rituals, and so forth. When I attended the event several days after speaking with her, I sat outside Tharlam monastery's lhakhang with approximately five hundred people, perhaps a third of whom were monks and nuns. Many family groups and friends sat together, talking with one another, saying mantras and moving their prayer wheels. There were no Western people sitting outside under the large tarp that day, though when the ritual broke for lunch, ten or twelve Westerners emerged from the lhakhang, together with another two hundred monks. There were loudspeakers through which the large group outside could hear Sakya Trizin rapidly reciting the texts, though it seemed unlikely that many if any of the assembled group could possibly follow it.

As one of the 'highest' of all Tibetan lamas, the Sakya Trizin's visit was

greatly anticipated by devout Tibetans and Westerners anxious to receive the rare (and enormous) cycle of empowerments he was bestowing. In mid-February of 1994, the empowerments were still going on, and continued to be a subject of discussion in Bodhanath. A very good Tibetan friend in her early thirties who had been accompanying her elderly mother to the wang at times told me that 'Tibetans [at the wang] do not understand the words of what is said – they go because it is beneficial.' When I asked *how* it was beneficial, she laughed. 'It goes in the ears and it brings benefit they say, but actually I do not know.' She further told me, 'most Tibetans, they do not listen [to what is being said]. You have seen them, haven't you? They are talking, eating, looking all around, this way and that, [while the] children playing and fighting.' When I asked her if she found the behavior of the Western people at the empowerments strange, she first said she could not see them inside the temple. She then remarked:

> But yes. They sit like this [she makes her body rigid and unmoving]. They sit and do not look around and do not talk. They are listening. We Tibetans do not think 'this is strange,' we think 'this is very good! Look how the Injys love the Dharma! How do they know so much?' Actually, I feel ashamed for us.

Great accomplishment

Drupchen or 'great accomplishment' ceremonies are conducted by Kagyu and Nyingma religious specialists in accordance with their specific ritual traditions; they are arguably the most intensive performances of the year in the monasteries of Bodhanath.[24] The 'great accomplishment' rites may also be viewed as a particularly powerful and demanding performance that incorporates elements of the 'empowerment' genre in that the participants and their surroundings are transformed into the mandala of a specific Vajrayana deity (with retinue) and the deity's blessings are then bestowed.[25] Some monasteries perform several different drupchen ceremonies a year; they may also perform the same one several times a year. The ritual itself lasts between seven and ten days, is centered around the supplication and accomplishment of a specific array (physically mapped as a mandala) of deities, and is perhaps best thought of as a collection of rites, many of which are repeated on consecutive days. From the time they have been summoned to abide within the three-dimensional mandala palace constructed for them in the main hall of the monastery, the mantras of the principal deity(s) are recited day and night. And while the bulk of the ritual performers (monks and tulkus) are only present from pre-dawn to dusk each day, some monks will remain in the lhakhang throughout the night to insure that the mantric recitation is uninterrupted. Very nearly all of the monastery's monks and tulkus are in attendance, with the senior ranking tulku usually acting as dorje lopön, or ritual master. On the last day of the rite the mandala deities are asked to depart, and the substances that have been consecrated by their presence are distributed to the monastic body, and to the lay public, as particularly powerful blessings.

In 1993 and 1994, I attended three different drupchens in Bodhanath; I attended only one in its entirety. Two took place at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling gompa, and the other was undertaken at Shechen.[26] I heard about them from other Western Buddhists staying in Bodhanath, but in particular from a group of very committed Western Buddhist expatriates, disciples of Tulku Urgyen and Tulku Chökyi Nyima, who actively participated in the drupchens at the gompa of their teachers. Thus Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling, initially built by Tulku Urgyen and now presided over by his son, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, was unique in Bodhanath in the degree to which Western lay Buddhists took part in a fundamentally monastic ritual. Lisa, an American woman who had been in Nepal for four or five years, encouraged me to attend me one of these. After I inquired how long it would last, and realized it was every day from before sun-up to about 6:00 in the afternoon, I think she saw the less-than-excited look on my face.[27] 'Rinpoche has said that to sit for an entire drupchen is extremely beneficial. It generates the same merit as doing a retreat!' Thus cajoled, and curious, I made plans to go.

On the initial day, all of the tulkus of the monastery, and the vast majority of monks, sixty or more, were in attendance. There was also a small group of Tibetan and Tamang women, sitting along the front wall (the wall with the massive double door that led onto the monastery's public courtyard) on the floor. In addition, there were twenty or so Western Buddhists – the majority of whom had been disciples of one of the monastery's tulkus for at least four years, some for ten years or more – sitting along the far right wall. The spatial arrangement of those involved in the drupchen is indicative of the hierarchy – and the varying levels of engagement with ritual activity – that characterizes Vajrayana Buddhism. Those of highest rank, the emanation body lamas (*sprul-sku*), sat closest to the back wall, where the holy images, scriptures and reliquary chorten were housed. They sat on high thrones (the height and position determined by the status of their incarnation lineage relative to the others) at the heads of two long rows of monks who sat facing each other, perpendicular to the back wall of the temple. The rows of monks sitting behind low tables framed the wide central aisle leading from the temple door to the huge images of Lord Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, and Vajrasattva deep inside. Behind these rows of monks were further rows of monks, all seated on low, thin cushion-covered risers perpendicular to the great statues along the back wall.

During the nine days of the *Sngags-gso* drupchen, and at the *Tshe-dkar* drupchen held later in the year at the same monastery, between ten and twenty Western Buddhists attended every day of the proceedings. They were not the only lay people in attendance, but they were quite unlike the few Tamang and Tibetan women who sat on the floor near the doors of the temple, quietly reciting prayers on their rosaries. Approximately eight Westerners sat on low risers with low tables in front of them, just like the rows of monks they sat behind. These eight expatriates (from the US, Canada, Switzerland, Germany) were among the most senior of the tulkus' lay Western students, and all followed the proceedings of the rite either directly from the Tibetan texts or from English

translations of these texts that they had in front of them. Many, if not all of them, had participated in this and other drupchens many times before. Another eight to twelve Western Buddhists sat on the floor near them, or on the opposite side of the hall, trying to follow along in their translated texts, reciting mantras or sitting in meditation posture. And there were also whispered questions back and forth, about the ritual and its symbolism.

What became apparent in the course of the drupchen is the difference with which the majority of Western Buddhists and local laity approached the ritual. Few local people, with the exception of the devout older ladies, could afford the time away from work and family obligations that participation in the drupchen demanded. Full participation was the domain of tulkus, monks and (in the case of the drupchen at Shechen) a few lay yogins (*rnal-'byor-pa*) – all religious specialists.[28] For Western Buddhists, the drupchen was 'an opportunity for intensive practice,' or, as a French woman remarked, 'a chance to be in the presence of the lamas in a powerful environment.'

On the final day of the Sngags-gso drupchen the ceremonies began earlier than usual, around 2:00 a.m.; with first light still hours away, it was the same group of tulkus, monks and slightly over a dozen Westerners gathering in the temple, just as they had for the week previous. Shortly after dawn over two hundred Tibetan, Nepalese and a few Western newcomers arrived; between 6:00 and 10:00 a.m. there were approximately four hundred people in the gompa. Previously the vast majority of the lay people had been women; now there were many men. Many came in and sat down where they could, to receive the blessings that come when the mandala is opened.

A few hours after dawn the mandala was 'opened' and the substances (often referred to by participants as *dngos-sgrubs*, literally meaning 'actual accomplishment') that had been consecrated over the course of the previous seven days were distributed to all participants. By touching various ritual objects in turn to the heads of those who had gathered, the presiding tulkus also bestowed blessings (or empowerment) on everyone. At this point, virtually all of the hundreds of 'newcomers' departed, leaving the 'core' of participants for the final few hours in which the deities would be asked to depart and auspicious verses recited in closing. For Western participants, myself included, the rich activity in the temple, the symbolism and the Tibetan liturgical texts used in the drupchen all called out for interpretation. How could one sit through days of ceremony without understanding what was occurring? Further, could one do so and be a 'Buddhist'? One of the women sitting next to me during the *Tshe-dkar* drupchen (in late February of 1994) remarked that she was 'very very frustrated' at not knowing 'what is going on.' As there was no translated English text to follow for that ritual, she told me she planned to ask Rich, an American who had been in Nepal for at least a decade, to help her make sense of it.

* * *

The attempt to understand, so as to eventually *participate fully*, seems to mark Western Buddhist subjectivity as different from the Tibetan laity's focus on receiving the *material* supports of the deities' blessings from the tulkus. For many Western participants this latter aspect is also important, but is problematic too; the 'blessing' is somehow unrecognizable without foregrounding the *meaning* of the ritual activities and their symbolism. Yet the majority of lay Tibetans do not seem to see it this way. Whether one can explain or interpret the ritual and its symbolic components or not, the very experience of being touched by, or consuming, the sacred substances bestows the blessing. As much as Western Buddhists are told by their teachers that receiving empowerments and attending drupchens confers great blessings, it seems that for many Western Buddhists the 'real' benediction of the drupchen is quasi-magical, but mostly in the sense that the hermeneutic process is magical or transformative. In other words, the blessing is greater – indeed significant – if one knows the meaning of what is transpiring in the ritual. The meaning of the rites that constitute the drupchen are not public knowledge, but there are authoritative 'readings' of the ritual as text. Thus for Western participants, the will to know is yoked to the oral and written texts in which meaning can be located and then fixed – and by which they are themselves located and fixed as (particular kinds of) 'Buddhists.'

As Tibetan lamas encourage their Western disciples to participate in drupchen practice, there are several possible ideological effects that may be produced. The first consists of Western Buddhist subjects positioning themselves with their teachers, though perhaps not at all consciously, against a cruder – or at least a more populist – form of Buddhism. Indeed, even though this may occur 'unconsciously,' I would argue that it occurs precisely because of an overt 'consciousness' about being 'Buddhist.' For a few Western Buddhist participants I spoke with, the last morning of the drupchen, with the sudden appearance of a Nepalese, Tibetan and, admittedly, a small Western throng, illustrated the difference between their higher (or more accurate) understanding of the drupchen's significance as against the understanding of the 'superstitious' masses who misread the *idea* of blessing or empowerment as a *material* thing.

The seventeeth-century master Rtse-las sna-tshogs rang-grol criticized those who collect empowerments, and those who seem to believe that a mere touch on the head by a ritual implement gives them a blessing; at the same time, he avoids characterizing the 'blessings' as merely symbolic, without any material basis (Kunsang 1993: 37). Western Buddhists are not exempt from reading empowerment or blessings as literal and physical, and indeed, all were very concerned that the empowering vase or ritual implement actually touches their head in the course of bestowal. Yet even as I met expatriate lay Buddhists who were taking some of the ritually blessed substances to their family (or, in two cases, to their Buddhist domestic servants), these same people were clearly involved in a level of intellectual abstraction that took the drupchen as an object of inquiry *and* practice.

Despite the recognition that Vajrayana rituals are explicitly open to multiple levels, for some Western Buddhists it is their knowledgeable *interpretation* of the

rite that makes it efficacious. And their interpretations, often sanctioned by their Tibetan teachers, are what become naturalized as 'Buddhism,' such that the lay practice of Tibetan and Nepali onlookers seemed like something 'other,' something nearly unconscious. It seemed almost a commonplace among Westerners (and several high-ranking tulkus) in Bodhanath to mark the difference between Western and Tibetan Buddhists equivocally, in terms of 'faith.' As one tulku put it, 'Foreign people ask many many questions. "What is this? Why is this?" This is good. And Tibetans have great faith. For foreigners this is very hard.' Another tulku expressed a similar idea in a slightly different way. He commented on how Tibetans 'already believe that Buddha is special, and that karma and reincarnation are real. Western people are very smart and understand well, but they are not sure.'

I often reflected on the apparent similarities between the sort of epistemic position occupied by many of my Western Buddhist friends and that of the anthropologist. For the Western Buddhist and the anthropologist, meaning is to be gleaned from more knowledgeable informants, and by participant-observation. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, 'the relationship between informant and anthropologist is somewhat analogous to a pedagogical relationship, in which the master must bring to the state of explicitness, for the purposes of transmission, the unconscious schemes of his practice' (1977 [1972]: 18). As far as ritual knowledge, proficiency in literary Tibetan, and sheer will power to endure long complex ceremonials are concerned, I submit that more than a few of my Western Buddhist friends are better anthropologists than I. But this is not simply a matter of Western hermeneutic and epistemological tendencies, for Western disciples are encouraged in their performance of rites and their need to understand them by their Tibetan teachers. The Western subject position encounters an exile Buddhist elite that takes proselytizing (albeit in a unusually quiet and self-assured way) as its highest goal. If the foundation of the Mahayana Buddhism is to aid all beings, it is likewise a given that the propagation of the Dharma is its apex: it alone has the taste of liberation and it alone shows the way to beings that wish for happiness.

* * *

For both Western Buddhists and Tibetan lay people, lamas are multi-faceted resources or repositories of spiritual power. Yet the two groups differ in the aspects of the lama that they prioritize. So, for example, while Western Buddhists are largely interested in asking the master's advice on matters of spiritual practice (again, largely having to do with the practice of various visualization techniques and meditation), as well as asking questions about doctrinal positions ('if the self is illusory, how does karma adhere to us over lifetimes?'), Tibetan lay people foreground the lama's role as a source of blessings and averter of negative circumstances.

While sitting with a small group of Western students in the receiving chambers of a well-known tulku one morning in 1993, it became apparent – from the

low whispers and the shuffling of feet at the door – that a group of people were just outside. As Rinpoche taught us Westerners, answering questions from group members on the proper attitude to adopt when practicing meditation on a deity, and on the distinction between essential essence of mind (*sems-kyi ngo-bo*) and foundational basis of mind (*kun-gzhi*), his attendant monk led in a Tibetan couple and their young children. During a break in the question and answer session, they came forward to offer ceremonial gifts to Rinpoche and to receive his blessing on their bowed heads. The father of the family then asked a question in a low voice, and Rinpoche responded by performing a divination (*mo 'debs-pa*): picking up his rosary, uttering barely discernible mantra with his eyes half-shut, and then counting the rosary beads off in groups from both the left and right of the strand, moving towards the center. An answer arrived at, it was pronounced to the family, who then left with an answer to their inquiry and with blessing cords (*srung-mdud*) from the tulku around their necks.

Western Buddhists first approach Buddhism as an object of knowledge – to be understood, figured out, grasped – while many Tibetans treat the ceremonies, and the Buddhist doctrine/theory that lies behind it with a certain matter-of-fact-ness. When talking to Tibetan lay people about the specific meanings of various ritual implements, or the sub-parts of a ritual, the most common response to my queries was 'I don't know' or 'I am not sure – you go ask the lama.' Perhaps many lay Tibetans would also respond, were it not for courtesy and respect, with an attitude of indifference. Unlike the Westerners sitting close to them in the empowerments, drupchen, or at the spectacle of the masked monastic dances, most Tibetans are not concerned with overt meanings; that is, after all, the province of specialists. They are, however, concerned with the efficacy of the rite, which, according to one level of discourse, has nothing to do with whether one can interpret all the symbols and ritual activities. Even given the explicitly hermeneutic nature of Tibetan Buddhism, in which many symbols and ritual practices are said to possess an outer, inner, secret, and most secret – or innermost – meaning, such a view of ritual productivity is sanctioned, especially by discourse concerned with the transformative power of faith (*dad-pa*).

As we have seen, Western Buddhists often cited their participation in the 'refuge ceremony' as the genesis of their Buddhist identity, yet this alone was not quite enough to be a 'real Buddhist'; it should be followed by the *study and practice* of Buddhism. Such directives, which are explicitly enjoined by Tibetan lamas on their Western disciples, create particular kinds of Buddhists. Tibetan lay people also recognize that the quest for enlightenment cannot be achieved without tremendous effort and – many would probably add – without study. What goes without saying is that not everyone can enter into the sort of specialized study and practice that would produce this result, whether due to the sheer amount of perceived effort involved, a person's other life commitments (usually family: either to spouse, children or parents) or simply a lack of interest.

Indeed, if one is truly interested in the Dharma, and is also without family commitments (or consciously frees oneself from them), the natural choice for a Tibetan would be to enter the monastic order, or, less commonly, adopt the life

of a yogic practitioner. It thus makes perfect sense that among householders, it is largely the older and less productive family members who are engaged in intensive Buddhist practice, whether it be the recitation of mani, circumambulation of holy sites, reading of religious texts, making offerings at the Chorten or at local monasteries, etc. It is the older folks who not only have time to devote to religious observances, but also the real awareness that their time to accumulate virtue before death arrives is running out.

What emerges-then, especially in the case of the long-term expatriate Buddhists, is a class of Buddhist that has emphatically specialized knowledge about Tibetan Buddhism, and yet does not quite fit into any of the Tibetan categories of Buddhist practitioner.[29] Though the vast majority of Western Buddhists are lay people, certain aspects of their situation (i.e. the practice of meditation, the study of texts) are more analogous to that of Tibetan monastics or yogins – religious specialists – than they are to the Buddhism of lay Tibetans. Of course, few Western Buddhists are called upon by their communities to perform ritual activities, and few would consider themselves adept enough to do so. It is their engagement with Buddhist teachers, Buddhist texts and transformative practices that allows for the ostensible similarity in discursive positions among many Western Buddhists and those Tibetans who are particularly engaged with religious life as 'Dharma people' (*chos-pa*). At the same time, it is the self-consciousness discussed in this chapter, and its manifestations, that sets the foreigners in Bodhanath apart from most Tibetans, whether lay or monastic, and reinscribe their difference.

In the following chapter I continue to probe the parameters of 'Buddhism' and the production of 'Buddhists' that was begun here. Especially, I turn to the discourse of local Bodhanath Tibetans and Western Buddhists for examples of the ways in which the Dharma functions as both a sign of similarity and of difference. That is, how is it that Buddhism becomes universalized, a balm over the surface fissure between East and West, and yet also returns as the shadow of this binary logic, a tool that enables the identification and emplotment of essential difference underneath the surface of similarity?. Such an examination requires a further discussion of Buddhist 'practice,' particularly meditation, which is a powerful marker of (Buddhist) identity and transformation for Western Buddhist practitioners. I also take up something that has been skirted in this chapter, the increasing self-consciousness of Tibetans with regard to their identity *qua* Buddhists. For just as Western travelers and expatriates have been interpellated by elite Tibetan discourses in their search for 'what it means to be a Buddhist,' so too have Tibetan exiles been hailed by the discursive practices of modernity with regard to nation, religion and identity.

8 Dharma and difference

Practical discourses

> A question was put to [the lama] by [one of the Western Buddhists] as to whether learning is an obstacle to meditation or to realization, as some teachers seem to have taught. Rinpoche replied that … [this is not the case at all]. One reason for studying is so that one may have certainty that one has found the highest teaching. Reflection is also essential so that one may be sure that one has well understood emptiness, dependent origination and so forth. Without this, meditation is like eating meat without teeth. But worse than no learning and no reflection is wrong learning, in which one only learns and never puts what has been studied into practice.
>
> (Fieldnotes, September 9, 1993)

While the previous chapter is concerned with the self-conscious study of Buddhism by Western travelers and expatriates in Bodhanath, as well as their engagement with 'seminars,' teachings and rituals led by Tibetan lamas, this chapter turns to the other 'wing' of Tibetan Buddhism that is study's necessary complement: *practice*. The general Tibetan term used by lamas to refer to (spiritual) undertakings in such a context is *nyams-len byed-pa*, 'to practice' or 'to experience,' i.e. the opposite of mere theory. Whereas study is meant to provide an orientation towards, and an understanding of, the authoritative doctrinal view (*lta-ba*) of the Ultimate Truth, it is practice that makes this understanding actual or experiential.[1]

Here I investigate just what Western Buddhists seem to mean by 'practice,' in particular the disciplines of meditation, recitation (of religious texts and mantra syllables), prostration (to representations of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha: the Three Jewels), and undertaking retreat (itself an intensification of, and sign of commitment to, 'practice'). Like the orientations described in the previous chapter, but to an even greater degree, these bodily practices are undertaken by Western Buddhists in order to effect the transformative soteriology of Buddhism; that is, to one day attain enlightenment and become Buddhas. But the practices of meditation and so forth are not just normatively sanctioned behavior that is a means to an end, but also produce a sort of Buddhist – and a particular view of what constitutes Buddhism – that accord with elite Tibetan understandings of the Dharma.

This begs the question of who might be constituted as ‘other’ sorts of Buddhists, namely Tibetan lay people who are not adepts. While I have already addressed the outlines of this in earlier chapters, I turn here to the ways in which Tibetan lay people are understood through tropes of difference and similitude, and as sites of desire and disavowal, within Western Buddhist discourse in Bodhanath. Thus we return to the discursive themes of expectation and its attendant, disenchantment, so marked in the accounts of travelers in search of the authentic. I also return to notions explored in a slightly different context in chapter 2, concerning the travel of spiritual bodies and (de)territorialized essences across international borders, across race and culture. That is, how is it that Tibetans appear as models for the Western Buddhist-to-be, and what are the ramifications of this modeling which takes an ‘other’ as prototype for a newly emergent (Buddhist) self?

Tibetans themselves are not mute witnesses or silent mirrors that reflect the gaze of Western Others. Many are caught up in the desire to locate a universal Buddhism precisely because it has been represented as their gift to the world. Thus even in spite of, and perhaps due to the perceived universality of the Dharma, there is also an attendant valorization of the uniqueness of the Tibetan culture (and the now-absent nation) that has safeguarded it. Of course, some Tibetans, especially the younger generations that have grown up in exile, have become reflective about Buddhism and the ways in which their ‘essential’ nature and their concomitant self-image have been refracted, that is, bent, in the mirror that the West holds up.

Meditation: the inward gaze as outward sign

One afternoon in 1993 I spoke with Greta, a Buddhist expatriate who had been living in Bodhanath for several years, and working as a medical practitioner. In conversation she once spoke dismissively of people she referred to as ‘Dharma bums’ and I asked her to elaborate. It was someone, she said, ‘who just talks about where they have been and who [i.e. which lamas] they have met and various empowerments and like that. It is people who come and go from here [Nepal] and travel around and don’t really practice.’

The importance of undertaking spiritual ‘practice’ was obvious to Greta, and, to be fair, was probably keenly felt by most of the so-called Dharma bums as well. Although there are obviously very different levels of engagement with Buddhist ritual, meditational, and ethical practices among both Western and Tibetan populations, I don’t recall ever meeting a Western Buddhist who was able to ‘practice’ quite as much as they would like, or as much as they thought they should. Further, while there may be some Westerners who are thought by their fellows to be ‘flaky’ or ‘not serious about practice,’ there are also some Western Buddhists in Bodhanath who are much admired for their Tibetan translation skills (which benefit everyone else); for their commitment to retreats or to monasticism; or sometimes simply because of their kindness. As one long-time resident reminded me, there are still others whom one simply never knows

about, because they are just 'doing serious practice' in out-of-the-way places, with no fanfare at all.

Lest she be thought merely judgmental or self-aggrandizing, Greta truly respected many of her 'Dharma friends' and made that very apparent to me. She specifically remarked about the 'real renunciation' that she saw in many of them: how one had left a comfortable medical practice in Europe to live, nearly penniless, in a small room in Bodhanath, taking care of monks and others for free; how a few others 'worked so hard for the Dharma' by doing translation, editing and publishing work and receiving little in the way of monetary compensation; how even some of the wealthy people she knew had given up far greater comforts available to them in the West in order to study and practice the Dharma. For Greta it was this seriousness about practice that marked a true Dharma 'practitioner' as different from a Dharma 'bum.' For many Western Buddhists, it is this commitment to actually practicing meditation, attending teachings and undertaking retreats that makes them Buddhists.

During the course of my research in 1993 and 1994 I met several other Euro-American scholars who had undertaken projects in Nepal. One had been working in the Khumbu area, and because of her work with Sherpas, she had met a number of Western Buddhists while back in the US:

SCHOLAR: [I] met one fellow who was a Dharma person … He was so connected with the identity of his gompa and of his teacher and of what a Buddhist is … The first thing [Western Buddhists] say to you is 'Are you a Buddhist?' You have to have that label attached to you.

PM: They would ask you that? Did you get asked that a lot because of your research?

SCHOLAR: Yes, yes! They would me ask me that.

PM: And what would you say?

SCHOLAR: I say 'No, but I'm very interested in it, I have high respect for it and I'm intrigued by it, and I am learning about it [the Dharma].' The next question is always 'Do you meditate?' This was time and time and time again: 'Are you a Buddhist? Do you meditate?' If you don't meditate, you're not a Buddhist!

For a great many Western Buddhists, being a Buddhist means 'practicing' Buddhism, and this in turn signifies quotidian meditation or regular practice 'sessions' above all. In conversations that I had, and continue to have, with Western Buddhist friends, the term 'practice' is frequently employed to cover all forms of Dharma activity, public and private, including mantra recitation, making offerings of real and imagined (visualized) substances to the Three Jewels (*dkon-mchog gsum*), doing prostrations before their representations, and circumambulating holy sites, like the Bodhanath Chorten. At the risk of equivocating, while some Western Buddhists would not have judged my researcher friend by whether she 'meditated' or not, they might well have questioned whether anyone could be a Buddhist without 'practicing.' Practice is clearly the more general

term, while meditation, as it is used by most Western Buddhists (as well as Tibetans) that I met, refers to exercises aimed at advanced para-mental states and ultimately spiritual transformation. This is not merely a matter of semantics, for in the distinction between these terms or in their collapsing, and in their operation or absence from Tibetan and Western Buddhist discourses, we find traces of how they mark difference and identity.

According to Pabongka (Pha-bong kha-ba, 1878–1941) Rinpoche, meditation (*sgom-pa*) refers to 'familiarization techniques directed toward a single subject' (1991: 246). In this way, he seems to link the term *sgom-ba* to *goms*, which in colloquial Tibetan means to be familiar with or accustomed to. For example, he writes, 'we have thoughts that lack faith in our spiritual guide, so we turn our attention towards thoughts of faith in him; we use this technique to familiarize ourself with these thoughts and gain control over them. This is meditation' (*ibid.*).

Meditation, when it is taken to mean something akin to mindfulness (*dran-pa*; Skt. smriti),[2] is not necessarily separate from other practices like performing prostrations and reciting mantra; indeed both of the latter ideally involve using visualization techniques and are motivated by a desire to both purify oneself and benefit others. Thus prostration to representations of the Three Jewels purifies negative activities of the body; recitation of mantras, which are the vocalization of the deities, purifies the negative actions of speech; and meditation, in which one visualizes the attributes of the deity, purifies negative mental activities. As both Western and Tibetan Buddhists told me, such practices also accumulate spiritual merit and help tame the mind. But for most Western Buddhists, meditation refers to more than this. Having read books and attended seminars, classes and meditation practice with Tibetan masters, most Western Buddhists are at least familiar with some of the range of techniques that come under the rubric of meditation in Tibetan Buddhist discourse. Many were explicitly engaged in various kinds of meditation on a regular basis, and in fact came to Bodhanath partly in order to find a suitable place, and more time, for their meditation (and other) practices. Kevin, a British man in his thirties, traveling for the better part of a year, noted that Nepal and India provided him with a more positive 'environment' for practice, and also, a cheaper place to do so (without having to work all the time).

There are diverse schema into which Tibetan Buddhist meditation techniques may be classified, and by means of which their premises (*gzhi*) and goals (*'bras*) may be envisaged. Very briefly, these techniques include practices that might be said to focus and calm the mind through attention on outer or inner phenomena, such as the breath, a flame or a sacred image, and practices which have a more analytical bent, in which the mind reflects on philosophical formulae (e.g., the links in the chain of dependent origination), or inquires into the direction, shape or characteristics of feelings, thoughts or thought itself. In common with other Buddhist schools, the former may be classed as 'calm abiding' (*zhi-gnas*; Skt. shamatha), and the latter as 'clear seeing' or 'insight' (*lhag-mthong*; Skt. vipashyana); Tibetan teachers also speak of techniques which are the union of

these two. Examples of this include the uniquely Vajrayana meditational practices (Skt. sadhana) focused on particular wisdom deities, in which one visualizes and then merges (identifies) with the mind and attributes of this being, as well as the systems of 'the Great Seal' (*phyag-rgya chen-po*) and 'the Great Perfection' (*rdzogs-pa chen-po*).[3] Tibetan lamas are said to teach such advanced meditation practices to disciples according to their interests and capacities. According to the comments of several teachers whom I heard speak in Bodhanath, practices that were once deemed secret or only bestowed upon a very select few disciples are now being taught more openly.[4] Still these practices and their intricacies are little known among the general Tibetan public.

But again, meditation is not the only kind of 'practice.' Lisa, an American Buddhist who had been living in Bodhanath for four years or more when I met her, told me that several other expatriate Buddhists in Kathmandu were very close friends of hers, and they not only socialized together, but 'do practice together' at times too. I asked her what she meant by 'practice,' and she replied: 'Well, it takes different forms. Maybe walking – doing kora (*bskor-ba*; circumambulation) – around the Stupa, maybe doing prostrations, maybe sitting in drupchen, maybe sitting at teachings, in teachings, maybe going on a pilgrimage somewhere.'

Later I asked her if she felt like there were differences between Western and Tibetan Buddhists:

LISA: I think maybe most Westerners don't engage in Vajrayana practice as much as just sitting meditation. Quietly. Concentration meditation or whatever. And Tibetans do more mantras.

PM: Do you do a [meditation] practice with a particular deity?

LISA: Yes.

PM: You do, okay. And do you think that is the sort of meditation that Tibetans do?

LISA: Yeah, they do. But just sitting down for an hour, quiet, maybe that's going on [with Tibetan lay people], who knows? Maybe they're continually, some are continually in meditation, who knows? I can't see their minds. It looks from the outside like most Tibetans practice OM MANI PEME HUNG [the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Compassion] – Chenresi deity practice … It looks like that to me, on the outside, you know? And there's a lot of praying going on here [in Bodhanath] – looks like.

As Lisa makes clear at several points, her suppositions are based only on what she sees. Indeed, the inner state, which is directly related to meditation for Lisa, is opaque. So she bases her interpretations on external behavior ('looks like'), while imputing certain possible characteristics to Tibetan meditation as an internal site ('maybe they're continually, some are continually in meditation'), before finally underlining the uncertainty of any response to my vaguely irritating questions ('who knows?').

This interview fragment also exemplifies the slippery nature of the word 'meditation,' or more precisely, the ambiguity of its referential object. And yet, Lisa is completely comfortable probing possible typologies of meditation. For all of the possible divergences that she points out, Lisa later ended our discussion by saying that finally, there are no really significant differences between lay Tibetan Buddhists and lay Western Buddhists. It is interesting to note that Lisa was the only Westerner I interviewed who told me that she learned how to do some initial Buddhist practices, like prostrations and how to set up a 'proper altar,' from a lay Tibetan friend. Her perspective in that way was certainly unique.

In the arena of religious practice, 'meditation' as a daily undertaking has been normalized among Westerners to a degree that it has never been among lay Tibetans. For the religiously inclined among the latter, it is the repetition of mantra (*sngags-bzlas*), the recitation of religious texts (*kha-'don dpe-cha*),[5] ritual prostration (*phyag-'tshal*) and circumambulation (*skor-ba rgyab*) – all of which may or may not be combined with visualization practices – that are primary. Western Buddhists in Bodhanath also undertake most of these practices, so it is understandable that Lisa might see in them a bridge of similarity between her own spiritual life and those of the Tibetans around her.

Many Tibetans told me that this kind of virtuous behavior (*dge-ba'i spyod-pa*; *chos-pa'i spyod-pa*) that accumulates great merit (*bsod-nams*) is practiced more by older and middle-aged Tibetans; they not only have more time, but are said to have a greater 'faith' than many young people today. Tashi, a 29-year-old woman I spoke with at length in November of 1993, discussed this as she explained to me the differences she saw between Tibetan and Western 'practice'.

TASHI: Tibetans don't, I mean, *nobody* does meditation. Actually I think Buddhism, the way Westerners go about it and the way Tibetans go about it, is completely different. We don't need to do the things that Westerners do anyway. We don't have to sit for hours and watch our breath. We don't you know, if you ask most Tibetans, have they done ngöndro [special preliminary practices], most people haven't done it.[6] They might be seventy or eighty years old and haven't. Whereas Westerners, you know some people have to do ngöndro first.

(Her friend cuts in)

YANGCHEN: Ngöndro is the foundation for all higher practice, but just for manis and benza guru [i.e. reciting common mantras] you don't need it.[7]

TASHI: When Tibetans are much older, and then some people become like monks or anis, they might do the whole ngöndro – just practicing all the time you know. But just the ordinary lay man, the ordinary working person, doesn't do all that … You know, I think for the ordinary layperson [Dharma] is just putting Buddhist principles into practice, which is the important thing. Okay, you know, they do [circumambulation] because for them that is their practice, or they might do mantras morning and evening, and just generally being compassionate during the day in daily activities. Being nice to beggars, you know, handing out money, handing out food.

> Being nice to servants. I mean, you know, there is a huge difference between how Tibetans treat servants and Nepalis treat them …

YANGCHEN: And they never intentionally kill anything.

Tashi was quite right. When I directly asked older lay Tibetans about what it meant to be a Buddhist, and how one should act as a Buddhist, some of them spoke about ways of making merit, but even more spoke about the necessity of kindness or compassion towards others, and honesty in one's everyday life. One woman, who expressed the sentiments of many, said that you must have compassion for all beings, and avoid doing harm to others. When I asked about meditation (*sgom-pa*), the same woman said, 'that is very difficult.' The emphasis on the ethical component of Buddhism was reiterated not only by the lay people I spoke with, but was also addressed in nearly every Dharma discourse that I heard given by Tibetan teachers in Bodhanath. Nevertheless, it was not often prioritized by Western Buddhists in their discussions with me about Buddhism.[8] Instead, it is 'practice' and 'meditation,' both of which are used to describe a sort of spiritual technology deemed lacking in the West, that have pride of place in an orientation that privileges inner states and experiences.

Tibetans are quite aware of the possibility of these experiences and states, but for most lay people 'meditation' is clearly the province of religious specialists. Dekyi, a devout Tibetan woman in her forties, was somewhat unusual in that she had Western Buddhists staying at her house from time to time, and was friends with several expatriate Buddhists who lived in Bodhanath. When I asked her if Tibetans meditate like Westerners do, she noted that:

> Tibetans believe that you must first do the ngöndro – and if you don't finish [those] before you try to meditate, [the meditation] will have no results. Ngöndro makes your mind stable, you understand? Previously people thought that if you meditated before you finished ngöndro you would become crazy. It is said to be dangerous.

An older Tibetan woman told me the same thing. 'Meditation is very difficult, and it must be done correctly, or you can become sick or crazy.' She illustrated the latter point by telling me the story of a Western woman who was seen walking around the Chorten, taking off her clothes and talking to unseen beings! Regardless of exact interpretations, meditation was seen by many Tibetans as something best left to virtuosi. Not only is it difficult; it might be dangerous. Further, there is the equation of meditative practice with renunciation; one does not live in town, or perhaps even in a monastery, and meditate. For example, when I spoke with monks about meditation, many of them immediately began talking about undertaking retreat (*mtsham-rgyab-pa*). Meditation for them meant a special series of practices marked off from the everyday world, carried out in relative solitude – unlike the hive of activity that characterized monastic life in Bodhanath.

While Western Buddhists might admit that one may be a Buddhist without

practicing 'meditation' in the sense that Lisa describes of 'sitting quietly' for a set period of time each day, for nearly every Western Buddhist that I met meditation – whether sitting quietly watching the breath, or reciting mantras while visualizing a deity – is the centerpiece of a self-consciously spiritual practice. Even people who told me that they were unable to find time to meditate daily, people who could not practice as much as they would like, or who apologized that they were 'too lazy,' implicitly reinforced this view. According to Thomas Tweed, it was *not* meditation as a practice that attracted most early American interest in Buddhism. 'The lure of an alien "intellectual landscape" and the desire for a more intellectually satisfying worldview seems to have been more relevant to nineteenth century Buddhist interest' (1992: 159). It seems that the current Western fascination with Buddhism *as* meditation derives partly from modern discourses, especially following Freud, concerning techniques of self-recuperation and 'improvement.'[9] For the Western Buddhists who came through or were living in Bodhanath, this notion of a 'daily practice' with meditation at its heart is *the* normative Buddhist activity.

It is this concern with meditation, a concern with developing a solid and unmistaken practice, which brings many Westerners to Bodhanath. As already noted, it is here, in the environs of the Great Chorten, that Westerners attend classes, seminars and have private or semi-private audiences with Tibetan lamas. Many questions put to the teachers are concerned with applying what has been heard to daily life or daily 'practice;' many questions are also prefaced by the remark 'in my practice …' or 'when I meditate …'. Every lama that I have ever heard teach has remarked upon the importance of putting the Dharma into practice, and many explicitly discuss meditation in this context.

In August of 1993, I went to see a prominent Tibetan master. Rinpoche was informally teaching about twenty-five people, mainly Westerners together with a Taiwanese woman and two Nepalese men. He explained two different ways of practicing: with a 'session' (of formal meditation) and 'moment by moment' as we go through our days. That is, he stressed the need to have at least a one-hour 'practice session each day,' but he also talked about the importance of remaining aware when we are not sitting in the meditation posture. During the time that Rinpoche taught, two small groups of Tibetans came into his chambers and did virtually the same things: they prostrated to him, then proceeded to offer him ritual scarves (*kha-btags*) and finally both groups requested him to perform a divination (*mo-'debs*). All this happened at the front of the room while the students waited; it took only a few minutes. The first group looked like a family, led by an older Tibetan woman. Rinpoche gave them his blessing and some rildrup (*ril-sgrub*; 'accomplishment pill' or blessed substance to ingest), after which they departed. The other 'group' was a brother and sister pair. They received a more extensive blessing, together with rildrup and *srung-mdud* (a blessed 'protection cord' which is tied onto the body), before they left too.

I do not know if it was inspired by his visitors' entrance that morning or by something else, but Rinpoche then proceeded to indirectly contrast some Tibetan practitioners with Westerners, saying that many Tibetan people may not

have 'high mind' or an understanding of Emptiness, but they know the importance of loving kindness, of seeing all beings as one's mother, and they firmly believe in karma. To Westerners, kora (circumambulation) and mani recitations (the six-syllable mantra of Chenresi, which is known to all Tibetans) might seem foolish or not worth much, he said. But he noted that when hands hold prayer beads they automatically begin to tell them – it is just what our hands like to do – and with this practice there is an automatic linkage to our mouth, so that we begin to say or think the mantras even without meaning to. This in turn is connected to our minds. If nothing else, Rinpoche said, this praying on the beads saves us from gossip and bad talk in the moments when we are engaged in it, and it has the potential to do very much more.

In short, Rinpoche gave voice to the difference that we had all just witnessed, even as he incorporated diverse subject positions under the rubric of Buddhism. In particular, Rinpoche cautioned against the possible superiority that Western Buddhists might feel on examining popular lay Tibetan practice, while at the same time subtly naturalizing the differences in our Buddhist orientations. What unites and naturalizes this diversity, but which went without saying in this instance, is the scholarly Buddhist perspective that as beings produced by karma (or 'culture' or 'nature,' which for most Tibetan scholars would probably be read as expressions of one's karma), we are *a priori* different in our inclinations and capacities to practice Buddhism, hence we require different means or methods. Cultural difference is mitigated by the higher order universality of the Buddhadharma, a Truth that is one but has many doors. We now consider other ways of marking and explaining difference as they appear in other discourses about Dharma, Tibetans and Westerners in Bodhanath.

Buddhism as nature and culture

While it is impossible to even summarize the transformative practices carried out by Western Buddhists under the guidance of Tibetan teachers, I want to emphasize what Taussig (following Benjamin) has called the mimetic faculty, and its operation in some of these endeavors. Mimesis, completely dependent on an Other that may serve as model, works precisely through the body, the speech and the mind; it is a sensuous knowledge (Taussig 1993). At the highest levels of engagement with a great many Tibetan Buddhist meditation and ritual practices is the explicit envisioning – perhaps more appropriately, embodying – of oneself as the deity who is invoked. This deity is at once radically other, immaterial, with a body of light, yet also irreducibly inseparable from the most essential part of the practitioner. 'It seems to me vital to understand that this power [that the imaginer derives] can be captured only by means of an image, and better still by entering into the image' (Taussig 1993: 62). In the context of Tibetan deity yoga (*lha'i rnal-'byor*), we might say that the image enters the imager, displacing any boundaries between ordinary and divine selves, yielding an experience that is, according to normative explanations, beyond subject and object, beyond Self and Other.[10]

More relevant for my concern with the production of specifically Western Buddhists are other levels of mimesis, ostensibly less ‘mystical’ and more ‘taken for granted’ within the space of traditional Tibetan Buddhist discourses. These mimetics come to play in the everyday encounters between Tibetan and Western Buddhists in Bodhanath, and in the actual space of the monastery itself. Beyond an attempt to understand and internalize Buddhism as an object of conscious knowledge, these are the subtle, less overtly ‘Buddhist’ practices that ‘produce’ Western Buddhists. Such practices are largely concerned with what might be termed the normative etiquette of entering a Tibetan temple: where and how one should speak, sit and behave in the presence of Tibetan teachers and monks, and how one’s comportment *as a Buddhist* should change in varying contexts. Bourdieu (1977 [1972]) has written of the ways in which cultural norms and the ‘structuring structures’ of habitus are internalized by actors in everyday sites and through everyday activities, such as the arrangement of the home and the rhythms of (agricultural) labor. The habitus is (re)produced in such activities in ways that are unremarkable, i.e. largely unconscious, to the actors involved. The connections between less-than-conscious knowledge, mimetics, and habit are powerfully productive. ‘Habit offers a profound example of tactile knowing … because only at the depth of habit is radical change effected, where unconscious strata of culture are built into social routines as bodily disposition’ (Taussig 1993: 25).

Attitudes of the body, learning the things that go without saying, are ‘completely natural’ to Tibetans in the temple hall. Indeed, until quite recently the very practice of Buddhism was, for many Tibetans, something matter of fact. Several Tibetans in their twenties and thirties told me that they learned ‘how to be a Buddhist’ from watching their parents and grandparents. This included the ways to set up the family altar, the various offerings to be placed upon it, and some appropriate prayers. Some Tibetans felt uncomfortable with this sort of knowledge, which seemed like no knowledge at all, because it cannot answer the question ‘why?’ Nevertheless, there was also a realization that they have ‘learned’ how to behave before lamas, how to speak, what to offer them, and what one should do inside a temple. As converts and cultural outsiders, Western Buddhists are sometimes hyper-conscious of such unspoken rules, attempting to learn them both by inquiring of those who are in a position to know (more experienced Western students, monks or lamas themselves) or by mimicry – just watch what everyone else is doing. ‘Everyone else’ in this case may be fellow Western Buddhists, co-actors in the meditation seminar that one is attending, or it may be Tibetan monks or lay people, who are perceived as being ‘in the know’ by virtue of their seeming rootedness in the cultural world one has entered.

Tibetans, perceived by Western travelers to Bodhanath as essentially Buddhist, present possible models to be not quite consciously emulated in order to access the Buddhist identity or essence that resides within them. By learning the Tibetan language, wearing Tibetan clothing and behaving as Tibetans appear to behave, might one close the gap between the Other and oneself?

Taussig points out the importance of both similarity (representation) and contact (contiguity) in his re-working of Frazer's discussion of magic. He explains that magic does operate through this dual logic, a magical mimesis that represents the Other in the very body of the self, in order to absorb essences and (re)establish identity – if only for a time.

There were a few Western Buddhists I spoke with who had remarkably strong ideas about the inherent qualities of Tibetan people, qualities that made them 'natural Buddhists.' This in turn marked them as irredeemably other, possessing that which we ourselves lack. One afternoon in early 1993, I had been in the Stupa View Restaurant in Bodhanath alone, and ran into an American man in his fifties who had been living in Bodhanath on and off for almost a decade. We recognized each other and he launched into a story apropos of my discussion with him about the possible differences between how Tibetans and Westerners perceive Buddhism. He had recently met a young Tibetan woman from a very well-off family, he said, living in Darjeeling. She had been well educated in an English medium school, 'but she didn't know anything about what Kagyu or Nyingma or Sakya [three of the four main sectarian traditions of Tibetan Buddhism] were – not even that! – because she had been in boarding schools.' I interrupted him at this point, saying I had also met young Tibetans with similar educational backgrounds. But then he assured me that 'this woman knows more about Dharma and is more Buddhist than you or I will ever be in many lifetimes, she just naturally is one.'

A few minutes after he left, I began to consider what he had told me. I had expected him to tell me that it was a shame that this young Tibetan woman had not learned more about her culture (read 'Buddhism') because of her learning environment, because I had heard such comments before, from both Westerners and from older Tibetans who would not, or could not send their children to such elite institutions as the one this woman had attended. But instead, after duly noting her lack of basic cultural and religious knowledge, he claimed that 'naturally' she was more a Buddhist than any Westerner could ever be. Where then does Buddhism reside, if not in cultural forms? In Tibetan bodies, arising *sui generis* from them?

There were other Western Buddhists, like Kevin (mentioned above), who also observed in Tibetans' behavior as Buddhists a naturalness that was 'attractive.' I had asked him about his impressions, after two months in Bodhanath, of his surroundings. He commented critically on the monasteries, but then explained further, reflecting on himself, 'I've got a romantic notion you know, but that's just it. Expectations.' Then I asked 'What about Tibetan lay people?'

KEVIN: Um. [They have] A natural faith and devotion, which is kind of nice. It's funny, what I see in the lay people – it's more attractive than the monks. The monks seem kind of more cynical.

PM: Do [Tibetan lay people] seem like us, like lay practitioners like us?

KEVIN: No. They practice in a different way. It's, um – they could be doing the job – but they are *from* Dharma. It's like natural for them. If they have a few

> minutes to spare they say a few manis, you know? It's kind of a natural thing.

Perhaps it is assumptions, or convictions, such as those expressed by my Stupa View interlocutors and by Kevin, that are at the basis of some of the Western fascination with Tibetans. And maybe it is ideas like this that lead some people to come to Nepal, study Tibetan language, live with a family if possible, and even adopt elements of Tibetan dress, facial expressions or body language. Though I could not have voiced it at the time, this is exactly what I embarked on when I first went to Nepal in 1984. Indeed, it is probably most of the reason that I returned in 1986. I had initially been captivated by what Tibetans represented for me, which coincided with my own conviction about the truths of Buddhism. Tibetans, as *a priori* Buddhists, seemed the model for my own goals of self-transformation.

This 'cultured' Tibetan aspect of Buddhist identity is not unproblematic for Western Buddhists, many of whom felt that there was a very important – though difficult to pinpoint – distinction between learning about Buddhism and learning Tibetan cultural beliefs. This concern is sometimes addressed by Tibetan lamas themselves, who caution Western disciples that there is no point in becoming 'like Tibetans' while endeavoring to become a Buddhist. On the one hand mimesis – identity shifting – depends on slippery, indeterminate subject positions that can be taken up in a process of becoming Other than what one is. On the other hand, the gaze that examines the desired Other, which in fact enables the whole process of mimicry, depends on identities which are seen as fixed and essential. The tension that is apparent for many Westerners in Bodhanath, trying to become a Tibetan Buddhist but unsure of what this says about their already established 'Western' identity, was expressed to me one day by a Canadian Buddhist traveler in her late forties.

We had been speaking about 'cultural differences' between Tibetans and Westerners. In particular, Lydia was concerned with how women are treated in Buddhism. She wondered 'just how important an issue this is for Tibetan teachers, even with the lamas who give it lip service.' She said that she found herself 'bowing and taking on the actions of Tibetan nuns – physically, you know, making myself smaller, hunching over' when she was with them. She said she 'caught' herself doing the traditional things Tibetans associate with women, much to her chagrin. Many Western Buddhists do appear initially infatuated with Tibetans as 'natural Buddhists,' and with Tibetan culture to the degree that it is a portal to a Buddhist identity. In fact, several expatriate Buddhists I spoke with referred to this attitude, which they *once* possessed, as 'the honeymoon period,' a point that will be returned to below.

But it is also clear that the discomfort that Western Buddhists like Lydia come to feel is due to the separation and reconstitution of Tibetan 'culture' as something different indeed from (Tibetan) 'Buddhism.' Further, it is a cultural space that she cannot enter, or at least not totally. Unlike the mythical anthropologist who 'goes native,' who somehow (mythically) undoes difference, Lydia realized

that this was not possible, or was not desirable. In the shock of recognizing that she was unconsciously reproducing Tibetan gestures and postures, Lydia encountered the Other again. This time, however, the Other was not out at a distance, but *in* elements of herself. Here, then, invoking a division between culture and religion can reassert the naturalness of difference; culture is where the Other belongs, while religion becomes the universal, translocal spirit. However, any such division was tenuous at best for some of my Western interlocutors. They seemed to feel the strain of taking the 'Tibetan' out of what has always been qualified in the West as 'Tibetan Buddhism.'[11]

Kevin was especially reflective about the 'natural' quality that Tibetans possess as Buddhists, in addition to his sense of 'disillusionment' that Bodhanath and Nepal did not quite live up to his expectations. He began by commenting on the presence of Tibetan Buddhist sectarian labels, especially among fellow Western Buddhists:

KEVIN: I mean, we're not anything to do with it [sectarian problems in Tibetan Buddhism] – I'm not a Nyingma, yeah? These Westerners aren't Kagyus, I mean, really? Are they? How can you call yourself a Nyingma if you're born and bred in London, or Sussex?

PM: I don't know.

KEVIN: It's crazy. It's crazy!

PM: Is it crazy to call yourself a Buddhist too?

KEVIN: Probably. Mind you, Buddhist just means inner being, someone who's traveling an inner path. This identity is all very difficult. All this wearing of [prayer beads] and, 'I'm a Nyingma practitioner.'

PM: Do you really think all of this is just wanting to find an identity?

KEVIN: Yeah, for sure. It's a contradiction here and I see it. Something just doesn't ring true, it's a contradiction. It's putting on fancy clothes, putting on masks, you know? When we're trying to get rid of masks really, aren't we? But we're putting them on all the time. So basically since I've been here I've got a little bit more cynical and a little bit more realistic if you like, about the whole thing. Rather than coming here and prostrating to the Rinpoches – 'Oh Rinpoche! Rinpoche!' – rather than doing a retreat – everyone's talking about doing a retreat, you know? – and things like this. It doesn't look right for me. It doesn't look real on other people, in my deluded view of things. Impure perceptions! I think I'm kind of seeing a reflection of all my shortcomings in other people, you know what I mean? All the things I hate about the way I've gone about it or all the things I could (*trails off*). Well, I'm seeing that in other people. Projecting my own thoughts on others.

PM: Were you brought up in any religious tradition?

KEVIN: No. None at all. So that's what makes it harder for (*trails off*). All this kind of 'blessings,' 'receiving blessings,' and walking around stupas, it's very hard because it's not in my blood, you know? Or, the desire for some kind of knowledge is very strong in the blood, but the way I think I should go about it – you know, the prostrations and things – isn't in the blood, so there's a

> kind of awkwardness there. About the whole show of Tibetan Buddhism … Devotion can't be fabricated if it's not in the blood.

Kevin rejects those aspects of Buddhist identity that he finds either un natural, like calling oneself a 'Nyingma practitioner' or carrying out certain ritual practices (prostrating and circumambulating) when one hails from Britain, or insincere, as in the donning of labels and paraphernalia in order to create a type of 'masked' identity. A Westerner identifying herself by reference to a Tibetan sectarian lineage ('Nyingma') struck Kevin as a charade, though a similar identification of oneself as a Buddhist is legitimized by his interpretation that this is in fact an 'inner' condition (again, nang-pa), not an external presentation dependent on culture, nature or history. Nevertheless, how can one perform as a Buddhist, or make this internal state emerge into outer, public behavior, without feeling that all of these externals are in fact already cultured as other, or perhaps, even deeper, a part of an other nature ('in the blood') that one is lacking?

In the course of my interviews I did encounter other Westerners who seemed to share this discomfort with the performative aspect of Buddhist practice, especially as it seemed to disturb firmly held ideas about difference and identity. One expatriate American teacher in her middle forties, who had recently begun studying more about Buddhism, told me that she found the 'outward actions' of Western Buddhists around the Chorten 'contrived.' She mentioned that seeing Westerners prostrating near the Chorten 'made me want to yell at them, "You are white! Get up!"' Yet it seemed perfectly natural, even 'powerful' to see Tibetans doing the same thing. Claire, a partially retired expatriate of some four years, and a Buddhist for many more, registered her own discomfort with public Buddhist practices. Even though she lived very close to the Chorten, and would sometimes go at dusk to join the other Tibetans, Nepalese and Westerners who were making circumambulations of the monument, she 'could not bring [herself] to say mantras' publicly because it felt too strange. In fact, she told me, 'I don't even feel comfortable wearing my mala (prayer beads) around [outside].'

Claire thought that part of her feelings of discomfort stemmed from the fact she had 'learned Buddhism in America,' where there were few Chortens or temples for extremely public display of Buddhist practice. Related to this may also be the American cultivation of religion as a private, largely internal affair, especially among upper middle-class whites. To make public displays of religiosity is awkward or unnatural for some, but this is also the reason that others find it 'liberating.' For as several Western Buddhists told me on leaving Kathmandu, one of the things that would be most missed was the opportunity to see 'people practicing, and public … reminders of the Dharma … The Chorten at night is magical, [and] there is such a feeling of community, you know, doing kora [circumambulation].'

Bridging the gap, and the re-emergence of difference

If there is a center to Bodhanath, it is the Chorten; the virtual Tibetan community precipitates into something nearly solid at dusk as groups of Tibetans of all ages and backgrounds move around the monument in one clockwise flow. There are also Tamangs, Newars and other Nepalese in this procession, as well as Western and Asian pilgrims who have traveled to Bodhanath or made it their home. People walk the flagstone kora circuit singly or with friends, sometimes breaking into bits of conversation as they spin the prayer wheels and tell their beads. Others sit on the outskirts of the Chorten's circular plaza, on the steps of storefronts, observing the people going by.

Looking at the crowd circling the Chorten on any given night, and especially on those auspicious full moon nights (the fifteenth day of the Tibetan month, when the capacity for earning merit is multiplied many times over), the Buddhist community of Bodhanath can seem very segregated. Language differences impede prolonged communication between some locals and foreign visitors, though many Nepalese and younger Tibetans speak excellent English. Perhaps a greater barrier are the differences that both locals and outsiders might perceive between themselves; some young Tibetans told me that Westerners with prayer beads in tow were 'difficult' or 'funny': 'they act so holy, like "I'm a great practitioner" … and they only want to talk with us about Dharma. It gets boring …' From the visitors' perspective, I often found myself listening to Westerners who told me that they could not escape the Nepalese and Tibetan requests for money, English lessons or help in securing a visa to the West.

While public space surrounding the Chorten may seem segregated by Tibetans and Westerners displaying physical or emotional distance from the other, there are also particular places where these distances are mitigated. On the western side of the Chorten, just within the perimeter wall that divides the concentric levels from the flagstone kora pathway outside, there is an area dotted by smaller chortens. Here, mostly out of view of those who pass by on the outer kora path, the devout undertake ritual prostrations (*phyag-'tshal*) on wooden boards slightly longer and wider than the fully outstretched human body. Prostrations are best performed before sacred objects or representations of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; the Chorten is not only an iconic representation of the Teacher, but especially symbolic of the Enlightened Mind (*thugs*). A full prostration entails placing folded hands over the head, then at the throat and then at the heart, while standing before the sacred representation. The devotee then drops to her knees and immediately stretches out the entire body so that it is flat on the ground, with the still folded hands joined over the head.[12]

As I walked along the first raised level of the Chorten, I would occasionally see Westerners alongside the Tibetan lay people in the 'prostration area.' Lisa said that doing especially intensive practice like prostrations with Tibetans – both in Bodhanath and in Bodh Gaya in India – made her feel 'their connection in the Dharma.' Lisa was rather unique, as already mentioned, in that she had first learned 'how to set up an altar' from her lay Tibetan friend Dekyi. Not only

that, but they used to 'do prostrations together at the Stupa.' Dekyi was also unique: she was the only Tibetan lay person that I saw with regularity at any of the teaching sessions given by Tibetan lamas to overwhelmingly Western audiences. Generally sitting towards the back of the room during one seminar, she was constantly reciting mantra on her beads with one hand, and turning her prayer wheel with the other. Meanwhile, Western students asked Rinpoche questions about different doctrinal views of emptiness or how 'we as Buddhists should relate to the Hindu god Shiva who is worshipped here in Nepal.'

If Dekyi's inclusion in teaching events attended primarily by Western Buddhists made her stand out (at least to the anthropologist's eyes), there were also a few Western Buddhists who told me about their experiences of being observed, as Buddhists, by Tibetans. One evening at the Stupa View Restaurant I met an Australian Buddhist in his middle thirties, Philip, who told me about his recent pilgrimage tour to the holy sites of Buddhism in India and Nepal. Several members of his all-Australian group had previously been to Bodh Gaya, Lumbini, Sarnath and Kushinagar with their Tibetan teacher as their guide. But on this trip their lama had remained behind in Australia.

Philip mentioned that most of the holy places they visited he really couldn't get a feel for, in a spiritual way, because there were too many people around and it all seemed so 'public.' He thought this was why he found it most satisfying to be at these sites late at night, when no one was around. The need to be alone and quiet so as to experience the sacred came up in other discussions with Western Buddhists, and with Western tourists trekking in the Nepal Himalayas as well. It seemed that too many other people, other foreigners like oneself in particular, marveling in the beauty of sunrise over the Annapurna range, can mar the authenticity of the experience, perhaps because these others suggest the presence of a recognized mere 'commodity.' Even more importantly, the meaningfulness or sacred quality of a moment spent at the foot of the Bo tree in Bodh Gaya or gazing up at the moon over Mt. Ama Dablam is largely derived from an ability to mark that moment as separate from what has gone before. This separation of a 'special moment' not only depends on the ability to focus on the outward object of awe, but more forcefully by dint of an inward focus linking this experience with an interior self. Given his frustration at how 'public' the holy sites of Buddhism were, and how this seemed to block their spiritual meaningfulness for Philip, I found it interesting that what had particularly impressed him in the course of pilgrimage was the interaction his group had with Tibetan pilgrims.

As their group performed prostrations, ritual 'feast offerings' (*tshogs*), and various other spiritual practices at the sites, Philip said that Tibetan onlookers seemed 'amazed.' He opined that perhaps some of this was due to the fact that there was no Tibetan lama with them, yet there they were, as (Tibetan) Buddhists at the great sites in India. That is, it was just Australians reading the prayers (in Tibetan), making the offerings and setting up makeshift altars. 'Tibetans would come up and stare at us, or laugh … both monks and nuns and lay people.' He told me that many Tibetans just whispered amongst themselves,

while some others came in close to see what they were reading; in a few cases Tibetans even joined in, sitting with the Australians and adding a few offerings or pictures of their own to the altar that had been set up. Philip also mentioned that at a few places, local Indians would lay some of their money on the altar, remove a few of the ritual offering scarves (*kha-btags*), and then sell them to Tibetans, who would then place the scarves as offerings back on the altar. He said this really made him angry at first, because 'they [the local Indians] are always trying to get in the middle!'

We might ask, what exactly are the uninvited Indians trying to get in the middle of? It appears that despite the actual presence of difference, as registered in the stares, laughter and whispers of the Tibetans observing the Westerners' performance of Buddhism, there was also for Philip a bridge across that difference, as provided by Buddhist practice. A few Tibetans collaborated with the Western pilgrims, perhaps recognizing themselves – with amazement – in the skin of the Other. Indeed, it seems that here there is a momentary inversion of Lydia's experience discussed above. Where Lydia recognized, with distinct discomfort, the mimetic presence of unnatural Tibetan behavior within herself, here we find the mimetic 'model,' the spiritual Tibetan, gazing outward at their selves reflected in Western subjects. Buddhism provides the ground here for something shared, as both Philip and some of the Tibetans he met on pilgrimage seemed to perceive.

But even in this situation, where the cultural difference of Australians and Tibetans is superseded momentarily by religious communitas, Buddhism can still function as the site for the eruption of difference, expressed both in the terms of 'religion' or in the return of 'culture.' In this sort of scheme, Indians, like most Nepalese, are outsiders; as Hindus, they have no ground to stand on in the Western Buddhist imagination. It is not possible to embark on a thorough discussion of this point, but suffice to say that for many Western Buddhists I spoke with, the Hindu Nepalese or Indian was immediately and irretrievably distant, in ways that Tibetans were rarely imagined to be. Indeed, the perceived indicators of this alterity, for at least a dozen Westerners I spoke with on separate occasions, were remarkably similar: the exclusivism of Hinduism (one had to be born a Hindu) versus Buddhism's universality; the preponderance of seemingly mechanical ritual in Hindu observances as opposed to Buddhism's philosophical sophistication (and for some, its agnosticism); the apparent cruelty of most Indian and Nepalese cultures with regard to the treatment of animals; the seeming low status of women. As one American woman put it, 'the Tibetans are much closer to us in so many ways.'

Peg, the expatriate mentioned earlier, also discussed a few incidents with me in which she had been doing some Dharma practice in public and had inadvertently drawn Tibetan observers. One of the places where this had occurred was at the Chorten itself, where she had done a purification rite with burnt juniper (sang), but it had also happened in the mountains, and in an area outside Kathmandu where she would sometimes go and spend time with a small group of Tibetan retreatants. She was aware that this purification practice was known

to many Tibetan lay people, but reflected on the differences she observed between Western and Tibetan 'Dharma practitioners:'

> Basically, most Tibetans don't know how to read Tibetan it seems. Most Tibetans don't know how to do puja [ritual worship]. They haven't studied the Dharma, they haven't studied Buddhism, they just inherited it. They're Buddhists, they're born Buddhists, but they haven't had the opportunity to really practice or study Buddhism.

Her we find not only the possibility of Buddhism as something to be shared by both Western and Tibetan practitioners, but also a bifurcation of Buddhism. Westerners may observe a 'natural' or 'inherited' Buddhism among most Tibetans, as opposed to their own 'study and practice' oriented Buddhism, as expressed in interview segments from the first part of this chapter. What is different is the value placed on these perceived positions. Unlike the man who claimed that a young Tibetan woman raised in Anglo-Indian boarding schools 'knows more about Buddhism than you or I ever will,' here we see the beginnings of a reverse estimation. Once again the practice of the Dharma as understood through a largely elite and specialist discourse takes primacy.

Many of the Western Buddhists I spoke with, especially those who had taken up residence as expatriates in Kathmandu, discussed their perceptions of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners as part of a self-reflective narrative on their own involvement in the Dharma. Not surprisingly, many of them found that the Tibetan Buddhism they had first come into contact with through books and meeting with lamas suffered some setbacks when they spent more time among Tibetans. It was never Buddhism that produced disappointment or that came to be regarded in a new critical light. Rather, it was the majority of Tibetans, sometimes Tibetan 'culture' itself, which failed to measure up as idealized paragons of Buddhism.

One European woman described her initial 'infatuation' with Tibetans, her attempts to learn spoken Tibetan, and her adoption of Tibetan dress while living in Bodhanath. But gradually she said this 'honeymoon period' ended. Further, she said that many of her friends had gone through similar phases. Not only had she been 'naive,' but she found that underneath the initial friendliness, it was very difficult to 'have Tibetan friends.' Jonathan, an American who had been living in Bodhanath for over a decade – sometimes working, more often living off a small inheritance – when I spoke with him in 1994 explained:

JONATHAN: I used to [spend time with Tibetans] much more. Now I hardly hang out with any Tibetans at all. And I used to spend more time with Nepalis also. [These days] the only Tibetans I really hang out with are either the lamas themselves, or monks, or the nuns, really …

PM: Has the way that you think about Tibetans or Tibetan culture changed since you first came?

JONATHAN: It certainly isn't exotic any more and in fact there's a lot of aspects of their culture I don't like at all. In fact, it doesn't seem to be any better than my own culture and of course when I first came I thought 'oh they're much better,' you know, 'America's just terrible …'. Now after many years here I've discovered that most Tibetans are just as materialistic as most Americans, if not more so, because they now have the opportunity to get all this stuff that they never had the chance to before. And you meet young people and there are very few that are interested in the Dharma at all. And of course you discover that people join the monasteries not because they're inspired to practice but [because] it was the tradition of the country they were in … and I thought 'oh, that's weird, that's surprising,' because I thought that you became a monk because you were interested and so forth. It's like a cultural thing for them. It's like being Christian or Jewish – just because you're born into that doesn't mean we're sincerely practicing or inspired by it. I thought, 'Wow! It's just like America. It's just here.'

Paul, another long-time expatriate, was unusual in that he did have a number of Tibetan friends, both monks and lay people. But he was also critical in his assessment of 'Kathmandu Tibetans.' He told me that he rarely went out to Bodhanath because it was so indicative of 'all of the business and money and materialistic grasping [that] most Tibetans are concerned with …'. He said that he had become cynical, but then added that 'there is still an attitude of humility in the majority of Tibetans in Lhasa, and I just don't get that in Kathmandu.' Paul's comments suggest that 'true' Tibetan Buddhist practice continues to exist, but not in areas like Bodhanath, or Kathmandu in general. There 'genuine practice' has been eroded by the intrusion of materialist values and global markets for Tibetan antiques, carpets,and, it would seem, Tibetan Buddhism. But for Paul, as for other Western Buddhists I met, the final answer to the cynicism and disillusionment he experienced is to reinscribe the personal and internal nature of what Buddhism means. For example, toward the end of our conversation, Paul mentioned the possibility of leaving Nepal. I asked him what he thought he would 'give up' by doing so. He mentioned several good friends that he would be leaving behind, but as far as what he would be giving up in relation to his 'practice': 'not much really, because you take your practice with you.'

Peg also mentioned this, in a discussion we had about Dharma practice and her disillusionment. The reader might recall that she had described her entry into Nepal as 'going home,' at the beginning of chapter 6. We had then discussed why she felt that Bodhanath was more conducive to practice than the United States, but her remarks quickly became far more ambivalent. She noted her 'disillusionment' at the hypocrisy she saw, and how 'it takes me down:'

PM: What kinds of things are you referring to?

PEG: There are so many examples, I mean, here the Dharma seems much more like a cultural than a religious thing, a way for Tibetans to keep their identity alive and it doesn't have much to do with the Dharma, it seems to me.

> It's more like, you know, we're people out of our country, how can we keep identity alive – let's make all these monasteries and create all these monks, at least they'll know something about their culture, whether they want to do Dharma or not, or whether they would rather go play in the streets and eat candy. But you know, that's reality, and it kind of puts you back on yourself. You know, Dharma is with me. I don't have to depend on all this or anyone else, I don't have to go to a monastery. I have my own personal Dharma and it's not like, cultural, it's not Tibetan. And I think that's good; it's realistic.

Peg's ambivalence was not particularly surprising to her, nor were similar feelings to others I spoke with. Western Buddhists as a whole appeared remarkably self-reflective about their engagement with the Dharma, as mentioned earlier, but also about their own expectations and unrealized hopes. As Kevin said to me:

> You know, before you go somewhere you form a picture in your mind. Almost in your mind you've been there and done it. I imagined it myself to be more exciting, more richer, more – but it's kind of, you get [*trails off*]. Over here it seems you just get on with your own life. You've got your own world. It's not that much different from back home really. You know what I mean? So I'm kind of disappointed, but it's a kind of positive disillusionment. But it's good though. It's the grass isn't greener, you know? And you find out.

For Kevin, as for Jonathan, Peg and Paul, the initial enchantment of Bodhanath (and for the latter three, the allure of Tibetans *qua* Buddhists) gives way to distaste when idealized representations of Buddhism fail under scrutiny. Similarly, most of them reflect on this experience and determine that it is a *positive* development when looked at from a deeper 'Dharmic perspective.' True Dharma, for each one of them, comes to reside within them; it is separated from its locality, from its host 'culture,' from the Tibetan modifier that precedes it ('Tibetan Buddhism'). At the same time, this separation, the reduction of the religious essence from cultural whole, is accomplished and understood in different ways by my four interlocutors.

Kevin, the British traveler, finds in Tibetan lay people a 'naturalness' and 'faithfulness' that he cannot, as a Westerner, ever hope to access. Thus he views Tibetan Buddhist practices, like prostration, devotion to lamas and even the wearing of prayer beads as 'forced' or disingenuous when taken up by Westerners. This leaves him with the following conclusion:

KEVIN: I think we have to be Westerners who practice Tibetan Buddhism in the end. You know, we've got to make Western society more positive and just kind of be within that society. Kind of make the Dharma Western, you know?

PM: Is that hard?

KEVIN: Well it is hard, and that's why I left [Britain]. And it's easy to come out here and turn into a Tibetan. Or try to.

Peg (like Jonathan) evaluated the Tibetan Dharma practice around her in Bodhanath in a more critical light, precisely because she was not sure that what she saw *was* Dharma. For her, the slippage and indeed overt identification of Tibetan culture with Tibetan Buddhism had come undone. In this bifurcation, true Dharma no longer necessarily resides within monasteries or among lay people who have merely 'inherited' Buddhism. Buddhism, for Peg, should not be about identity or culture, though this is what she perceives it has become in Bodhanath. This 'puts [her] back on [her]self' to find her 'own personal Dharma, and it's not cultural and it's not Tibetan.'

Jonathan's comments echo many of Peg's concerns about real Dharma and its distinction from what is merely 'culture.' In fact, when I asked him whether his sense of Tibetans as Buddhist practitioners had changed over time, he admitted that it had. His statement below reminds us of the crucial link here between 'true Dharma,' interiority and Buddhist identity for many Western Buddhists:[13]

JONATHAN: There aren't many Tibetans that practice. In fact, I think most of the Tibetans are really Hindu, because as far as I can tell they walk into a temple and they kind of bow to this big statue and they put this little offering of butter in front of it and throw a little money and they go 'Help, I need more money or [something like] this,' and then they walk out and that seems more like Hinduism. I don't think most of them understand about Emptiness [i.e. the philosophical view of *stong-pa-nyid*].

PM: No, probably they don't.

JONATHAN: And they say a lot of prayers, which is also nice, but Hindus pray a lot too. I think most Tibetans are kind of Hindus. Interestingly enough, this friend of mine who was married to a Tibetan – now divorced – this Tibetan said 'We Tibetans own the Dharma, we know all about it, we don't have to ask any questions about it. But you Injys are so stupid and don't know anything and that's why you have to ask all of those dumb questions.'

Jonathan's earlier statements above seem to indicate that 'Americans' and 'Tibetans' are not so far apart from each other in terms of their materialism; Tibetans are not described as inhabiting some spiritual demi-monde, but rather as being 'just like us.' Accordingly he says that for them too, as for most of us Westerners, religion is about (outer) cultural adherence, not (inner) spirituality. And though Buddhism as embodied by the great lamas is profound and powerful (Jonathan's sole reason for remaining in Kathmandu for over a decade), he raises the opinion that the majority of Tibetans are not just different *kinds* of Buddhists from us converts – they aren't 'Buddhists' at all. Finally, Jonathan underscores the idea that some Tibetans think of themselves as not only radically different from, but superior to 'Injys,' and also as 'owners' of the Dharma. Ironically, of course, one possible interpretation of his own statements suggests the reverse might also be true; we might ask who ends up seeming superior to whom here, and who is it that appears to speak for, and about, ownership of the Dharma?

Paul also found Bodhanath Tibetans, and the Western Dharma 'scene' in general, to be lacking the flavor of 'genuine Dharma practice' that he encountered in Tibet. Unlike Peg's or Jonathan's perception of the problem, that Buddhism had become little more than cultural identity, Paul suggested that the very decline in culture – the culture of Dharma – was responsible for the repugnant materialism among Tibetans-in-exile. Unlike many contemporary popular representations of Tibetan culture and religion – both Western and Tibetan – that locate 'authentic' Tibetan life in exile, for Paul, the 'real Tibet' is in the land left behind. This sort of discourse has become more prevalent among some Western expatriates in Nepal, for the same reasons that he gives: the corrosive presence of modernity amidst communities in exile, especially its effect on Buddhism. I even heard a similar opinion voiced by a respected lama in Bodhanath; he maintained that studying the Dharma for eight or nine years in some parts of Tibet (i.e. *Mdo-khams*) now is equivalent to twenty or thirty years of study here in exile. Paul's narrative seems to say that one can 'still find' the true aspects of Buddhist practice (an internal commitment, a humility) in Tibet itself, especially in its out-of-the-way places, and, more importantly, that one could cultivate these same things internally. We might say that Tibetan culture, when it exists in its (unaffected) place, retains close ties with the essences of Buddhist practice, but that at the same time, the Dharma is more than that. It is universal, and it is personal.

Given the preceding interview segments, in which Tibetans function as significant embodiments of the Dharma (or a site of its disavowal) for Western observers and practitioners, I now turn to the effects of this discourse, and Tibetan reactions to their positions within it. In what configurations and to what ends does the Dharma appear in Tibetan accounts? What is the place of 'natures' and 'cultures' in their self-representation, or in their discourses of difference?

Tibetan rejoinders and reflections

Much of this study has been concerned with the representation of 'Tibet,' 'Tibetans' and 'their' Buddhism in the context of Western engagement with the Dharma at the feet of Tibetan teachers in Bodhanath. In these final two chapters I have contextualized how Westerners are produced as Buddhist subjects in Bodhnath, and have highlighted the often contradictory discursive spaces that are permitted or assigned to Tibetan lay people in Western commentaries upon difference. In these comments, which are often subsumed within a larger discourse on normative Buddhism and its practice, ordinary Tibetans often play marginal roles, or worse, roles in which they function as little more than cultural or religious objects. In the following section I consider some of their reflections on the new transnationalism of Tibetan Buddhism and its implications for their lives in Bodhanath. What positions might Western Buddhists and Western travelers occupy in Tibetan imaginative practice? Most importantly, how are Tibetan conceptions of Buddhism, and their relationship to it, changing?

I attempted to talk with as many Bodhanath Tibetans from different backgrounds as possible during 1993 and 1994, though in reality, the very nature of my questions demanded that I have a certain rapport with my discussants, thus limiting my field of contacts. As this study has predominantly focused on Western narratives and representations, this section should not be taken as the voice of the Other come to light at last. As in the preceding excerpts from interviews with Western Buddhists, I make no claim to presenting a unified or necessarily representative voice. I am concerned to find currents in this discourse of encounter, wherein Tibetans sometimes laud, sometimes puzzle over and sometimes critique the Westerners who arrive in Bodhanath to study with Tibetan teachers.

In addition to asking my interviewees to explain their views on the changes they had witnessed around Bodhanath, as well as their opinions on business, politics and religion, here I was a Western Buddhist asking questions about 'Western Buddhists.' When it came to religion, lay people often prefaced their remarks with caveats and qualifiers, and when the conversation turned to my research, and what people thought of Western Buddhists, the answer was usually an unqualified 'very good!' Some of this, especially with people that did not know me well enough to speak directly, was certainly politesse. But it also connoted a palpable pride that Tibetans felt in their culture, and their assurance that the Dharma was indeed profound. As one Tibetan pointed out to me, 'Western doctors and business people – important people – come from so far away to study with our lamas.' Yet this overwhelmingly positive response to Western interest in Buddhism sometimes co-existed with more ambivalent readings. Sometimes the notion of the jewel of Tibetan culture garnering high estimation from people the world over led to fears that perhaps it was being spread too thin:

PM: Some people told me that there is a problem. Western people come here and spend a lot of time with the lamas, and therefore the lamas do not have so much time for Tibetans in Bodhanath –

DAWA: Who said that? Idiots!

PM: An elderly woman told me that nowadays many lamas go abroad, to America and Britain and so forth, so they are not here. She said 'Westerners take many of our lamas to their countries.'

DAWA: These people really do not know. They are wrong! Lamas travel abroad, and foreigners come here – why? It does not matter if one is Western, Tibetan, Nepali, Indian or Chinese. The Dharma is for all, isn't it? The Dharma is not for Tibetans to keep. Where was Shakyathubpa [Buddha Sakyamuni] born? Here [Nepal]. And long ago, many scholars came from India to Tibet.

PM: What do you think when you see Western Buddhists here? Is this always good?

DAWA: Yes, very good! Maybe there are one or two foreign Buddhists who are no good, but they really love the Dharma and they try to do virtuous acts.

Dawa was in his early thirties when I met him at the small table he sat at near the Chorten, his wares spread out on it in hopes of catching the eyes of passers-

by. We usually talked about politics: both the contemporary situation in Nepal and the international work of the Dalai Lama in trying to draw attention to Tibet. The excerpted discussion I had with Dawa above was instigated by remarks I had heard first in 1987, and then, as mentioned, from an older woman in 1993. But Dawa would have none of it. Like many of the Tibetans I spoke with, he talked about the universality of the Dharma. While the critics I spoke with did not bring up this point, it is doubtful that they would dispute it (I never heard anyone do so). Rather they focused on what they saw as a 'no good' situation in Bodhanath. Instead of lambasting Westerners, however, these statements often appeared as a form of self-critique.

One Tibetan gentleman noted that the monasteries around the Chorten would be better served if their teachers and abbots stayed in Bodhanath and watched over the discipline of the monks. He mentioned that good lamas will stay here and help Tibetans, not 'go off in search of money' to foreign places (*phyi-rgyal*, which includes Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, etc. in addition to 'the West'). When I mentioned that many foreigners are interested in the Dharma, and their offerings to the lamas help support the monasteries of Bodhanath, he was unimpressed. Maybe we need only the monasteries that we can support, like in South India, he suggested.[14] A middle-aged couple that I came to know quite well focused not on the West as a site of iniquity, nor on the faults of lamas. Instead they spoke of Western Buddhists in contrast to what Dorje, the husband, called 'stupid Tibetans.' When I asked about the wangs that Sakya Trizin had given in Bodhanath, he remarked that 'many, many people go,' but that he had to stay in town in the antique carpet shop. Dorje and his wife, Drolma, said that no one really understands what is being said, but still people 'bow their heads' to the lamas and have respect, but then they talk and eat while the wang or the explanation (*gsungs-chos*) is going on. Dorje explained this as 'Tibetan custom – and it is no good … We have gotten spoiled.' Drolma then described seeing Westerners sitting 'like this' (back straight, eyes down, mouth closed), and her husband said 'yes, meditation. No Tibetans do that. I think Tibetans are stupid. Really!'

Then Dorje related the story of going to the Kalachakra empowerment in Gangtok, Sikkim, in late 1993, presided over by the Dalai Lama. 'Even when Gyalwa Rinpoche (the Dalai Lama) was speaking to Tibetans in the common language many people were not listening.' He said, 'I listened very well, but most of the people around me were talking. If you asked them what the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel had said, they would not know.' But he said that many people now brag about going to the Kalachakra empowerment: 'I went, I am important!' (Dorje illustrates this with a swagger). 'Really, we lost our time, our opportunity, to understand.' I told him that I didn't follow him. Before, the same was true in Tibet, he told me. There were many great teachers and opportunities but most people took no advantage of it.

Before I said goodbye to them, I asked Drolma if it didn't seem strange that foreigners could sit so near to the Dalai Lama while he was giving the Kalachakra empowerment and teaching, yet ordinary Tibetans could not.

Wouldn't people be jealous? 'No, no. Under the Dharma, race (*mi-rigs*, literally, "class of person" also used for ethnicity) is not important. It is for everyone to benefit from. And Westerners really love the Dharma. They study and learn much.'

Just a week or so prior to this conversation I had spoken with another Tibetan couple, perhaps ten to fifteen years younger and far less well-off than Dorje and Drolma. I had spoken with Lhamo many times before on my way around Bodhanath, and vividly remember launching into an argument with her husband, Migmar, soon after meeting him in February 1993. Lhamo and I had been sitting with him near one of the shops that ring the Chorten, and I had, as above, been talking with them about the empowerments that Sakya Trizin was giving. In response to my query, Lhamo explained that it was mostly older people, and particularly women, who went to the empowerments. When I asked why, she said that men have to work and do business most days. Migmar turned to me and said, 'Westerners are really fortunate. They do not have to work and can study Buddhism a lot.' Tibetans, he told me, have no time; they have to work to feed their families. I replied that some Western people do work here in Nepal and still go to these events when they can. 'Well, then, they are very good,' he replied, seeming neither angry nor openly resentful. Still, his remarks indicated that he thought that Tibetans had been more or less forced into working and business ('we came here without any money or any place to stay'), while of course Injys can study Dharma as they like because they are freed by their wealth. His points were well taken and I told him so. Then he said:

> Western people are educated. If we go to see a lama they will tell us to go home and do manis. They will say, 'why did you come here?' But I think there is a close connection between Science and Dharma, no? So if Westerners come, the lamas know that you are educated, that you studied, no? So they will teach you.

Here Migmar linked the common perception of Westerners as 'rich' with an often repeated statement: 'Westerners love the Dharma so much!' For him, the former condition allowed the latter to occur, and it was this that marked one difference between Western Buddhists and Tibetans. In addition, Migmar's observations suggest that some Tibetans might not be content with being 'natural' Buddhists or archetypes of devotion for Western observers. The fact of education, or the proclivity for study, allows Westerners to access the elite discourses of Buddhism via lamas in a way that most Tibetans cannot. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Western 'habit' of study is deeply ingrained in most Western subjects and dovetails well with the high estimation that many Tibetans have toward education. Dorje's comments above about the 'stupidity' of some Tibetans, and his reflection that Tibetans have been 'spoiled' by 'no-good customs,' seem also to point to this as a difference not in intellect, but rather in the habits of intellectualization. We might consider that previous explanations of difference that have emerged earlier in this chapter – the 'faith'

and 'naturalness' of Buddhist Tibetans, as opposed to the 'awkward' or 'forced' Buddhist Westerner – likewise polarize this same dichotomy yet read in them opposite values.

But not all Tibetans I spoke to seemed comfortable with the dichotomy at all or with their seemingly given position within it. Migmar indicates this obliquely, but Yangchen and Tashi speak directly to what they see as the concerns of their peers: those who have come of age in exile.[15] Both in their late twenties to early thirties, the women were raised in very religious upper-class families; both were also educated outside Nepal. First they explained to me the deep importance of 'devotion,' 'without doubt,' to the Dharma, something that they too saw as a hallmark of their parents' generation, and then they took up my questions about the perceived ambivalence of young Tibetans towards the Dharma:[16]

YANGCHEN: Of course at a certain stage you rebel against what you are taught, but it [Dharma] is so deep in you, so much a part of your culture and how you think, it will come up – maybe later in life.

TASHI: But I think it's different for our generation. Okay, our parents' generation – there's that unquestioned faith. But like us, we have studied and been to school, many of us to Christian school, Indian school, so they've been exposed you know. So they want to know why they are doing certain things. They want to know why you go this way, clockwise [when you circumambulate the Chorten]; what is the logic? And okay, maybe this is just applicable to a few people, but I feel they want to ask questions [about the Dharma] but then there is no one to give them answers –

YANGCHEN: And they feel stupid to ask!

TASHI: Their parents may not be educated; they have that faith so they don't know why they're doing it [i.e. going round the Chorten clockwise, etc.]. But only a few people who practice seriously, they're either like monks or fully, fully retired [would know why] – otherwise they have to be from a family of lamas or of people who have really studied. I think just the ordinary lay man doesn't really know; they don't have the *dpe-cha* [religious text] know ledge, they don't know the real philosophy, so how can the average person ask their parents who don't know? And also the older generation has this belief that you are just supposed to believe. How can you ask a question? But our generation doesn't believe like that. They want to know why. They can't ask their parents, they can't just go to the lamas because of –

YANGCHEN: Communication gap!

TASHI: Yeah, there may be communication gap. The older lamas sometimes can't communicate so well.

PM: Because of the actual language you mean?

TASHI: Sometimes because of the language, or the accessibility of the lama. Sometimes there is quite a bit of formality you have to go through, different people you have to talk to, whereas I think it is easier for Western people to meet lamas because they just kind of stride in.

YANGCHEN: And they expect you [Westerners] to ask stupid questions. If you ask stupid questions they won't be surprised, because you are a foreigner and you are supposed to be ignorant about it [Dharma].

TASHI: So Tibetans first of all, they won't just walk in to a monastery and say, 'I want to see the lama and I have these questions.' Because they have that, whatever it is, a kind of respect for the lama, and so they won't just walk into a monastery. Maybe if there was a kind of teaching, but even then they wouldn't ask questions unless they really really really wanted to know and even then it would be quite bold. Still I think all Tibetans have that you know, belief in Buddhism, it's an innate thing. They still believe in compassion, they still believe in lamas – in Rinpoches – in things like that. Basic Buddhist principles. But maybe some of them want to know more, about the philosophies, but it's difficult for them. And then they are busy, carrying on making money and so forth … And I have heard many Tibetans say, 'Oh all the lamas don't have time for Tibetans. They are so busy organizing and only teaching the foreigners.'

YANGCHEN: But it is *their* fault – it's *their* fault! Because they have to make an effort to go and meet the lamas. If they don't do that, the lama is not going to say 'Come Tibetans, I will teach you!'

TASHI: But then again there's that Tibetan thing of 'how can you be so hampa tsawo [*ham-pa tsha-bo*; pushy] and say "I want this, I want that." So it's always like that. You know, as first generation you have all of these good things from your forefathers, and some bad things, but you also have your own experiences, your own opinion … I know there are many people who want to go [to some of the yearly seminars given by Tibetan masters in Bodhanath], but they are too shy. Or they think that it is only for Westerners … This is all because of our own society and ideas, no? People think, 'Oh if I ask [a question] like that people are going to think I'm acting like an Injy,' and things like that. So it just goes around and around.

Yangchen and Tashi begin their comments here by noting the difference between Tibetans and Westerners when it comes to Buddhism. But it quickly become apparent that there is no monolithic Tibetan subjectivity that exists beyond this oppositional structure, as most of this exchange describes the dilemmas facing young, educated Tibetans and their self-perceived difference from their parents. Tashi recognizes that her comments may be applicable to only a few of her generational peers; the concern with learning more about Buddhism ('its philosophies') and the reasons behind customary practices ('why?' 'what is the logic?') is most compelling for those who have been distanced from their 'innate essence' and habituated through other disciplines and modes of knowing (Christian and Anglo-Indian elite schools). In the current environment of exile, Tashi says that 'they have been exposed' to other ways, other authoritative discourses, so Buddhism can never be an unreflected upon practical knowledge undergirded by moral, cosmological and soteriological assumptions, as it may have been for their parents. For Tibetan lay people, as for 'cultural

insiders' everywhere, cultural practices and attendant attitudes – including religious ones – are often learned unconsciously, through modeling one's behavior on that of others. This also involves the incorporation of values and of what constitutes normative behavior – the literal embodiment of ideologies through practical activity (see Bourdieu 1977 [1972]). That is, the daily repetition of a variety of activities fosters attitudes and orientations toward the seen and unseen world without causing one to ask 'why?' Yet for many young contemporary Tibetans, Buddhism becomes an object of self-conscious reflection, an object of inquiry accessed through study. The importance of such an undertaking may be especially enhanced when core assumptions about the place of Buddhism in Tibetan identity are heightened like never before, both in indigenous and foreign discursive practices.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Tibetans in Bodhanath are made powerfully self-aware by their engagement with conditions, forces and discursive practices of late modernity. Pre-eminent among these is the brute fact of exile and their position as 'guests' (in the words of the Dalai Lama) in their host countries. Their refugee status, and the growing world media attention to their struggle – largely mediated by the figure of the Dalai Lama, and other 'emanation bodies' – have made Tibetans acutely aware of the power of representations. They see how 'being Tibetan' is reflected back at them in celluloid, in glossy coffee-table books and in newsprint (by both their own indigenous media and worldwide coverage), as well as by the concerns and questions of tourists in Bodhanath, by local Nepalese workers, landlords and politicos, and by the policies of the state of Nepal in which they live.[17]

A great many Tibetans self-identify with the images that the world has of them: exiled followers of the Dalai Lama; devout Buddhists; and pacifists. But among some of the young generation in Bodhanath, and for some elders too, there is an interrogation of these commonplaces, and some ambivalence as well.[18] Very few Tibetans that I met questioned the moral power and wisdom of their leader, and few challenged Buddhism's pre-eminent place as the essential and most important part of their identity as Tibetans. But the political structures and 'old society' hierarchies of the Dharamsala government are open to frequent, if guarded, attack, while the strategy of pacifism in the face of Chinese occupation has also been critiqued. And to return to the topic at hand, Buddhism and religious practice have become less opaque, more open to conscious reflection, than ever before. Soon after we had sat down to talk, Yangchen gave me her interpretation of the Tibetan and Western encounter in the broadly positive terms she shared with the vast majority of people I spoke with. Then she turned to the sometimes difficult personal ramifications of this encounter:

YANGCHEN: I feel that Buddhism is spreading to the West is … well, Tibetans and Buddhism spreading all over the world I think is very good. Because I feel that Buddhism is a very good religion, it's going to benefit many people. It's good, you know? And I think people will get a lot of benefit from it in

this life or the next life or whenever it comes. I have nothing about being possessive about it; the more it spreads, good! But, ah, the foreigners who are Buddhists, who come here with really fixed ideas, they sometimes overdo it, you know? I don't blame them, they are so excited and they go for it. Sometimes it's a little bit irritating because it's all they think about and all that they want to talk about – all that they know about. But um, it's not good to be so over-enthusiastic about some things. Because I feel with some Westerners if they overdo it they're not going to be that good [as Buddhists in the long run]. And I think it's good to have some doubts about it –

TASHI: Yes, some balance.

YANGCHEN: Like people, well, many Westerners, get such a shock when I say, 'I don't do any sittings in the morning. I don't do any meditation in the morning.'

TASHI: Yeah, that's right!

YANGCHEN: And if you say that to them they say 'oh, she's not a practitioner, she doesn't practice.' But I have my own way of practicing. Sitting cross-legged in a quiet place for three hours is not going to do anything [if] that's it, after that you forget.

TASHI: Especially Western Buddhists like to see Tibetans with that halo around [us]. Very Dharma, very Tibetan; in that culture. They can't see Tibetans as like professionals at the same level or maybe even as individuals or personal friends. It's more like this very ethnic character that they like to see.

PM: Do you think there is a difference with people who live here as opposed to people who are just passing through?

TASHI: I think it's the same. Yeah, I mean expatriates once they get here, basically they are very interested in Dharma and Tibetan culture, but you know, they don't usually want to mix around. Basically they remain in their small group, their interest doesn't go beyond that. But, ah well, I guess it is both ways. I mean Tibetans won't ever get into Western society …

PM: Do you ever get a sense of 'we know Dharma better than you do' from Western Buddhists?

YANGCHEN: No.

TASHI: No, in fact they always want to see you in that light. 'You are so lucky to have the Dharma!' In that quaint little ethnic picture; as if they don't realize that Tibetans are modern, and young, and together, you know?

Yangchen and Tashi's words are richly complex, a suitable final note for this penultimate chapter. Like the subjects in other interview segments presented in this and the previous chapter, both women tack through a discourse of difference and similitude in which 'Buddhism' is the lodestar. They discuss the problems of assuming a singular litmus test for Buddhist practices, and clearly mark 'sitting meditation' as the province of Western Buddhists. That is, they both reflect on how the reification of meditation as a hallmark of (Western) Buddhist identity can then function as a sign of lack when applied uncritically to Tibetan subjects. Such comments highlight not only Western 'difference,' but remind us that

Western Buddhist subjectivities are produced largely cleaving to elite Tibetan Buddhist normative discourses.

In the next and final chapter, I consider some further ramifications of Tashi and Yangchen's words, in addition to the other voices heard in this study. In particular, as a means of provisionally summing up what resists closure, I return to some of the discursive tensions at work amidst the translocal setting of Bodhanath.

9 Tibetan Buddhism

National culture and global treasure

In this study, all of my interlocutors have discussed (Tibetan) Buddhism from positions marked by differences in ethnicity, class, gender and age. Their reflections upon the Dharma tell us something about how Buddhism is observed; their discursive emplacement of just what constitutes the Dharma of course also coordinates their own identities as Buddhists. I emphasize the discursive practices and narrative tropes whereby seemingly 'natural' and homogeneous Tibetan and Western Buddhist subjects are produced, by examining the usually invisible assumptions that undergird this production. Thus this study focuses not so much on the specificities of position just mentioned, but rather on the differentiating practices and narrative forms through which Westerners and Tibetans have understood not only what it means to be 'Buddhist' but what it means to be hailed as one from 'the West' or from 'Tibet.'

In nearly all the comments presented here, Buddhism is troped as 'culture' – local, essential, and indeed, at times nearly synonymous with 'nature' – as well as extra-cultural, or 'universal' – a deep, indwelling, timeless Truth. Despite their full affirmation of the Dharma as a *universal* good, there is still for many Tibetans (as with Yangchen and Tashi) a powerful conviction of Tibetan culture as the container for the essential contents of the Dharma. As a legacy of their forefathers, Buddhism reflects their identities as Tibetans, but it also confounds the 'young generation' because it is not entirely clear how to approach it, let alone how it might be reconciled with other powerful discourses of the nation and of voluble modernities. Yangchen and Tashi opine that it is not only Westerners who wish to learn about, and 'study,' (Tibetan) Buddhism, but some of their young Tibetan contemporaries as well. Finally, almost radically, they indicate that 'Buddhism' refracts their identities, bending the light around them until they cannot be seen in any way except as 'very Dharma, very Tibetan,' and expected by Western others to remain in that cultural place.

As indicated throughout these chapters, Bodhanath epitomizes cultural disjunctures and national displacements even as it functions as the site for pure cultural products like Tibetan Buddhism to be put on display. Until recently, Bodhanath's Buddhism was incidental to Tibetan and other Himalayan Buddhists, unless they happened to be *en route* to Nepal or India for business or pilgrimage. Thirty years ago, the Chorten itself was surrounded not by mona-

steries, but by farm fields, and was populated not by Tibetan exiles, but by Newar and Tamang people who, though still vitally present in the economic and political life of the community today, are largely invisible to Western observers in search of Bodhanath's 'culture.'

Following the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, the outlawed Tibetan nation was reconstituted in north India, and approximately 80,000 to 100,000 refugees settled in India, Bhutan and Nepal – many assuming that they would soon return home. At this time, *Life* magazine and other American news sources portrayed the exile of the young Dalai Lama in its appropriate Cold War context: an Oriental god-king, the embodiment of inscrutable and ancient tradition, forced from his throne by godless communists representing the twisted end result of a modernity gone awry. It seems likely that the 'free world' (and especially the United States) saw itself as the middle term to both of these aberrations, clinging neither to deadening tradition and idolatry, nor to the Chinese apotheosis of materialism and 'society' at the expense of the God-fearing individual.[1] But if the Dalai Lama appeared an innocent at the mercy of a far greater Asiatic evil at that time, and his society one that could eventually benefit from modern democracy once the communists were gone, it seems that in the following decades the situation has changed. If Tibet was once to be liberated, by one or another of modernities' ideologies, it is now the deterritorialized traditional culture and wisdom of Tibet, existing in bodies and cultural products, that will liberate the West.[2]

While Nepal itself is marginal to the financial and economic centers of Europe, the Americas and Asia, it is central in Western fantasies of untouched, uncommodified life, where one can encounter people who 'live in pure culture.' Indeed, the culture that resides at these margins is able to appear spiritual by the working of other oppositional logics that come into play in these contexts; the 'archaic,' 'traditional' or 'primitive' is imbued with mystery and power in direct proportion to its distance and difference from the 'central modernity' of Europe and North America. Tibetan exiles prove particularly arresting to many foreign visitors because of their obvious difference from even the 'different' Nepalese peoples.

The Tibetan presence in Bodhanath speaks to their absence from a place that is now accessible once again via Chinese tour packages, but that is also often perceived as largely bereft of its essence. That is, Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism now function fully and perfectly only in diaspora. Even as many Western Buddhists lament the terrible destruction that Tibetans have suffered, some also referenced notions of karma in their discussions with me. They reasoned that if past actions had ultimately borne fruit as the devastating Chinese occupation, at least the suffering of Tibetans has not been in vain; it is this tragedy that enabled Tibetan lamas to come 'out' from behind the Himalaya and bestow their culture, their treasure, on the world.[3]

Malkki (1995) has written on the category of 'the refugee,' arguing that in the 'national order of things, refugeeness is itself an aberration of categories, a zone of pollution' (Ibid.:4). In terms of a strictly delimited 'national order,' for

example in the political relationships between Nepal or India and the People's Republic of China, exile Tibetans are most certainly an irritant to (inter)national sensibilities. So too have Tibetan refugees sought 'to become a "nation" like others' (*ibid.*), a goal that Malkki finds compelling for many refugee populations. What is particularly intriguing to me is that a relatively small group of Tibetan refugees have not only reconstructed a nation away from home, but have also made strikingly visible appeals within the even larger discourses of universal humanism in their struggle for the nation left behind.[4]

Still, Malkki rightly draws our attention to the ways in which most refugees are rendered 'systematically invisible:'

> as in the literature on nations and nationalism, as in the familiar old anthropology of 'peoples and cultures' … They can no longer satisfy as 'representatives' of a particular local culture. One might say they have lost a kind of imagined cultural authority to stand for 'their kind' or for the imagined 'whole' of which they are or were a part.
>
> (Malkki 1995: 7)

Later she notes the ramifications of such a loss, noting that 'the discursive constitution of the refugee as bare humanity is associated with a widespread a priori expectation that, in crossing an international border, he or she has lost connection with his or her culture and identity' (*ibid.*: 11).

My intention in reproducing her incisive work here is to highlight what I take to be the rather different semiotic valence of the 'Tibetan refugee.' It is as if, by the magic inherent in this particular geographic qualifier, the categorization of refugee is stood on its head. The *Tibetan* refugee *does* come to stand for his or her nation *in absentia*, carrying the culture as legacy and as precious cargo. Further, within the world of popular media representations (as well as many Tibetans' own estimations), this cargo is in fact their gift to the world. Tibetans are not usually portrayed as 'rootless' or as stripped of the aura that surrounds their nation-culture; in fact, quite the reverse. Nevertheless (as Malkki's reading makes clear) the Tibetan refugees' position in *political* and *national* orders is one of inherent weakness, even as their place in universal humanist discourses appears to be expanding, based on the presence of the Dalai Lama and of other Tibetan Buddhist teachers in international settings.

Western Buddhists have come to Bodhanath to access this treasure that has universal applicability. Herein lies the dichotomous tendency that informs so much of this study and is so productive of the encounters I witnessed and took part in around the Chorten. It is the particular semiotic power of 'Tibetan culture' that draws Western observers to this Tibetan boomtown on the outskirts of Kathmandu, yet in the commonplace reduction of this culture to Buddhism there is an opening for those Westerners who want to go beyond surface observation toward deep internalization of what Tibetans appear to possess. Read as a credo antithetical to disenchanted modern life, their Buddhism appears capable of functioning as an antidote to the ills of Western materialism, violence and

even environmental devastation. Some Tibetans themselves, especially important tulkus, have perhaps encouraged this perception, as in the Dalai Lama's proposal over a decade ago to make the Tibetan plateau a zone of (political and natural) peace for the benefit of the world. Beyond its utilization by Western subjects as cultural critique, it is important to remember that Tibetan Buddhism is approached, understood and practiced by Western subjects in Bodhanath differently from most local Tibetans. For Western travelers and expatriates, the pre-eminently modern discourses of individuality and interiority are utterly foundational, especially in articulating narratives concerned with self-identity.

As noted in chapter 8, the particular cultural aspects of Buddhism as practiced by Tibetans are both alluring and frustrating to Western Buddhists. Some of my Western interlocutors admired the way that Tibetans perform their Buddhist essence without artifice, in a way that seemed utterly natural. Tibetans could be read as model Buddhists under such conditions, yet in drawing near to the Tibetan Other so as to derive some of what they seem to possess, many Western Buddhists were confronted with an image in the mimetic mirror not of Tibetans, but of their own unreconstructed 'Western' selves. With the return or recognition of their cultured identities, and their distance from Tibetans reinscribed, Buddhism remains not just as Tibetan culture become nature, but as purely nature, an inner nature (*nang-pa*) to be learned and emulated.[5]

In this way, being a Buddhist means being an insider, such that the locus of true Buddhism becomes ever more internalized, especially through contemporary Tibetan lamas' emphasis on meditative technologies and Western subjects' expectations and desires to learn them. Again, such techniques have a long genealogy within Tibetan Buddhist teaching lineages, but their current practice by Western subjects does not thereby produce a 'traditional' Buddhist subject.[6] For some Western Buddhists in North America and Europe, the increasing emphasis on Buddhism as an internal practice, as a mental and emotional orientation that demands self-awareness, self-control and self-transformation, allows for a suspicion with regards to the Asian 'cultural' traditions that are deemed epiphenomenal with regard to the spirit of the Dharma. As 'culture' – that is, tied to specific places and people – it is possible to regard Asian 'tradition' as untranslatable to the modern West (at best), or as hidebound, problematically pre-modern, even corrupt (at worst). Hence the movements among some European and North American Buddhists for an unabashedly reflective 'Western Buddhism' that is often marked by more 'democratic' authority structures, an increased emphasis on lay participation in what was once monastic practice and ritual, and critiques of 'traditional' gender roles and biases.[7] Such trends hardly constitute a monolithic 'Western' Buddhism, but they do point to a questioning and (re)interpreting of received Asian traditions – whether Burmese or Thai Vipassana, Japanese or Korean Zen, and Tibetan Vajrayana – in which culture as tradition must be interrogated. Is cultured tradition merely trappings for the universal Dharma, or is it in fact an essential element in the continuity of the Dharma?

Nevertheless, for many Western observers become travelers, Tibetan culture retains its powerful aura as spiritual presence. As noted in chapter 3, for many tourists around Bodhanath this Tibetan spirituality is embedded in particular objects that proclaim a 'Tibetan' provenance. For those other Western travelers who have come to Nepal not only to find pieces of Tibet, but to find themselves through sacred Tibetan technologies, the spirituality of Tibetan culture is monumentalized in Bodhanath's monasteries and personalized in the figure of the lama who dwells there. These Western pilgrims come to find a local culture-in-its-place. Moreover, they desire an entrèe into this culture so that it may become one's own *within*, regardless of the difference that registers *without*. Finally, to recapitulate, that difference is necessary, for it is from the learned *Tibetan* masters in the gompas of Bodhanath, and in the centers of LA, Sydney, and Switzerland that Western disciples learn how to be authentic Buddhists.

* * *

As I argue in chapters 7 and 8, meditation and some degree of textual study – as encouraged by Tibetan masters – signify the practical essence of (Western) Buddhist identity. This 'elective affinity,' in Weberian terms (see Hallisey 1995), between the concerns of Tibetan scholar elites and the desires of Western Buddhists is capable of producing particular effects. Among these are the marginalization or romantic whitewashing of other Tibetan (i.e. non-elite monastic and lay) experience as it appears (or is absent) in Western discourses centered on 'Buddhism.' Equally possible, as registered in the comments of some of my 'disillusioned' Western Buddhist respondents, were related narratives in which ordinary Tibetans are hardly 'Buddhist' at all, because they failed to measure up to the ideals of what Western Buddhist practitioners had come to see as the essential marks of such an identity.

In chapter 1 I characterized Bodhanath as similar to what Pratt has termed a contact zone, for 'a contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other' (1992: 7). It is now possible that Tibetans watching Westerners watching Tibetans will create an even greater shift in the way in which Buddhism is perceived and practiced by Tibetan laity. Already the conditions of exile, along with exposure to a huge variety of media sources – both filmic and literary – makes being a 'Tibetan refugee' and a 'Tibetan Buddhist' a reflected upon identity. Among some young people, the contemporaries of Yangchen and Tashi, there may yet be new ways of being a Tibetan Buddhist that have greater affinities with Western Buddhist subjectivities than with traditional Tibetan lay roles.

Self-reflection and critical inquiry into practices and doctrines that their parents took for granted, together with an increased engagement with contemporary English-language Buddhist texts, were in evidence among many English-educated Tibetans in their twenties and thirties that I interviewed in Kathmandu. As such processes have historical antecedents in Sri Lanka and Thailand, where Buddhist 'modernism' developed in unique ways in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it seems likely that in time, other innovative

elements – particularly a greater involvement on the part of lay Tibetans in Buddhist meditative practices – will appear.[8] Nuancing such predictions is beyond the scope of my study here. Yet it is necessary to point out that apart from the very great differences between Theravada and Vajrayana societies, particularly with regard to the role of the ordained Sangha, the condition of exile heightens the Tibetan obligation to reflect on the nature of their culture, in addition to the culture of the nation. Furthermore, such reflection does not occur in a vacuum, but quickly becomes actualized and mediated such that parts of Lhasa come to be rebuilt in the Andes and in the Atlas mountains of Morocco and are then shown on movie screens all over the world.[9] If everyone knows that being a Tibetan means being a Buddhist, it is not altogether clear, at least for a few young Tibetans I spoke with, exactly what this 'Buddhist' identity signifies apart from its performance as *national* identity. That is, unlike their parents' generation, in which being a Buddhist literally went without saying, as did the acts that seemed to mark this subjectivity and the logic behind them, now there is some slight unease.

In February of 1993, I had a long conversation about my research concerns with a highly educated Tibetan acquaintance, in his late thirties, in Kathmandu. His bookshelves contained many English-language books on Tibet, as well as several works by the Dalai Lama, and Sogyal Rinpoche's bestseller, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Tsering noted that he had 'learned a lot' from these books particularly because they had ordered and categorized Tibetan Buddhist ideas in ways that 'made sense,' in contrast with Tibetan religious literature itself, which he found not only difficult to read, but difficult in the way that its knowledge was organized. Yet he challenged my opinion that perhaps representations of Tibetans as intrinsically and essentially 'Buddhist' were harmful in the long run. After I reiterated what young Tibetans had said to me, about the one-dimensional world of spirituality that many Westerners expect them to inhabit, my older friend remarked on my naiveté: 'Every culture defines those that it does not know about through stereotypes; at least ours is a very positive one in the eyes of the world.' But certainly there are Tibetans who have argued against the benefits of representing their nation and their culture only through a discourse of idyllic Buddhist imagery.[10] Jamyang Norbu, one of the founders of the exile Amnye Machen Institute, who has long argued about the harmful effects of these representations, was recently quoted as saying:

> We want Tibet the nation, not Tibet the Shangri-la that's going to save the materialistic world from its own greed … Tibet deserves to survive just because it is Tibet, not because it has something to give to the world … Tibetans don't want to be used as the crucible for the New Age experiment of Westerners.
>
> (Second ellipsis in text)[11]

As Appadurai (1988), Abu-Lughod (1991), Clifford (1988) and many others have written, the notion of difference when expressed through the trope of 'culture' is

not always liberating. Tibetan culture, often directly conflated with Buddhism, is now known and 'celebrated' throughout the world. But the Western gaze, whether tourist or Buddhist, often denies Tibetan subjectivity and reifies Tibetan culture in Bodhanath, even as some Westerners anguish either about its absence from its place of origin, or its corruption in exile.

Part of the unspoken message here is that for some Western Buddhists – particularly those who have lived in Bodhanath for a long time and have moved beyond their 'honeymoon phase' – Tibetan people can never quite live up to the imagined purity of their culture. Following Appadurai (1988: 37, 40), who notes that 'ideas become metonymic prisons' such that the 'natives' of a place become imprisoned by them, we might venture that Tibetans are incarcerated by their very religiosity.[12] At the same time, they have hardly languished there, for Tibetans themselves continue to work both for and against such characterizations, in often strategic ways. Indeed, they must. For when (Tibetan) 'culture' and (the Buddhist) 'religion' are semiotically collapsed, then there is the danger that Tashi spoke of in chapter 8, that Tibetans cannot be seen as 'young, modern, and together.' At the same time, if 'culture' and 'religion' are bifurcated, as among those Western Buddhists who fear that many Tibetans have become bereft of the pure Dharma, then Tibetan culture is epiphenomenal, and purely local. What might this augur for an exile 'Free Tibet' movement, caught up in the discourse of nation and dependent upon world visibility in their struggle to regain culture's homeland?

Consider the many Western Buddhists in Bodhanath who told me that they would have 'no interest' in Tibetans or Tibetan culture if it were not for Buddhism. For some of these travelers and expatriates, Tibetan culture was initially alluring, but ultimately repellent, either because it was finally too different from the modern West ('sexist,' 'hierarchical,' 'superstitious') or indeed, for several people I spoke with, not different enough ('materialistic,' 'hypocritical'). In these cases, it is the universal aspect, the larger-than-local Dharma, that continues to appeal. But it is vital to remember that just as there are different subject positions claimed by contemporary Tibetans in Bodhanath (e.g., 'young and modern,' 'able businesswoman,' 'health professional,' whether they are visible to Western observers or not), there are also different ways of performing and narrativizing the 'Western Buddhist' subject.

In the United States, I have met many Western Buddhists keenly involved in political action surrounding the Tibetan struggle for an independent homeland, and certainly the image of 'non-violent-Buddhist' Tibet has helped the international publicity for this cause immensely. Though I encountered both thoroughly apolitical and fiercely engaged Westerners in Bodhanath, the majority of Western Buddhists there seemed to be neither. Many subscribed to the ultimate goals of the Free Tibet movement, but in fact were little involved in political activism. Regardless of their (a)political positions, many Western Buddhists I spoke with found justification, or perhaps better, inspiration, for their stances by referring back to the Dharma. Some mentioned the global importance of the Dharma and its benefit for all humanity (the nationalist struggle for Tibet being

of far less import), while most others argued that Tibet regaining its status as an independent nation mattered precisely because of the connection between the land, the people and Buddhism.

Kevin was the most obvious example of the former. When I asked if he was 'economically or politically active with any Tibetan groups [at home],' he said that he was 'not very comfortable' with political actions. One Tibetan independence activist group had asked him to take part in some political theater at a shopping center, but he refused, and told me that 'even the leafleting' had been 'too much.' He explained, 'that side of it is for me not important. I can do more for the Tibetan kind of issue by practicing their wisdom. Or *our* wisdom, or whatever. That's more helpful.' In Kevin's remarks we find the fullest expression of Tibet's association with a local spirituality, and then this spirituality's transformation into a free radical, a universal spirit, that moves from *them* to *us*. The nation falls by the wayside of wisdom.

Just a few weeks prior to this conversation I happened to be in the receiving room of a lama who was discussing Tibetan society with an assembled group of about fifteen foreigners. He contrasted his experience of life in eastern Tibet with what he took to be Western peoples' often naive and romantic view of Tibetan life. A French woman raised her hand to object to the lama's characterization of some Tibetans in Tibet as aggressive and violent, both historically and up to the present day. She said she had recently been to Tibet, and that many of these aggressive people were fighting the Chinese and were 'freedom fighters' and 'heroes.' The lama replied that becoming angry, fighting and taking life were not the qualities of a 'hero' (in Tibetan, *dpa'-bo*). Drawing on the word's meaning as part of the Tibetan gloss for 'bodhisattva' (*byang-chub sems-dpa'*), he noted that 'true heroes' for Buddhists are those beings who are not involved in the attachments of the world, and whose nature is compassionate. So while the French woman sought to include political struggle in her view of Tibetans as heroic, the lama would allow no such equation. Perhaps as part of his interest in debunking Western fantasies about a purely spiritual Tibet, he refused to let Dharma be used to justify – or mystify – worldly matters. More likely, he also found it impossible to consider the narrative of nationalism as anything more than ignoble when compared to the sublime Dharma.

Scholars like Chatterjee (1986) have directly questioned the 'problem of nationalism' in the post-colonies: must the discourse of nation always replicate the power asymmetries that structured colonialism and revealed the underside to the promises of modernity? To what degree is it now possible to think outside of the nation? It is interesting to reflect on this in light of the Tibetan hunger strikes in New Delhi in the Spring of 1998, and the increasing demands for nationhood among Tibetan activists who are impatient with the Dalai Lama's peaceful struggle based on Buddhist principles. It would appear that whatever the primacy of Buddhism as an authoritative discourse in old Tibet, the possibility arises that now in exile, and under the continuing Chinese occupation, Buddhism must now contend with the well-practiced nationalism that depends on force. Can both be in service to the Tibetan nation? While these two

discourses of violent nationalist struggle and Buddhist pursuit of the nation through Truth are conceived of as incompatible by some Tibetans and by many Western (especially Buddhist) observers, Jamyang Norbu opines that they are not necessarily so (*Asia Week*, September 18, 1998). And George Dreyfus (1995) reminds us that the use of violent 'state' force in Tibet was historically both problematic, because of its ideological implications for an explicitly Buddhist government, and resorted to as a pragmatic given by the Tibetan State (*Dga'-ldan Pho-brang*).

Thus, we might consider the Dalai Lama's insistence on autonomy, *not* independence, for his country. Should this be read as a cave-in to the PRC's demands? Or perhaps as a reinscription of Buddhism's pre-eminence over the discourse of nation? In a 1996 interview with *Le Monde*, the Dalai Lama stressed his wish for direct negotiations with Beijing, insisting that he wants autonomy, not nationhood:

> A sort of cultural genocide is happening in Tibet. And if losing independence is acceptable, on the contrary losing one's culture, accepting the destruction of our spirituality, of Tibetan Buddhism, is unthinkable … Protecting the cultural heritage of Tibet has become my main concern.[13]

While many Tibetans I spoke with feel that nothing short of independence is what they deserve and are entitled to by the fact of their history, I also encountered a very few people, nearly all of whom were Tibetan religious teachers, who found the question of nation to be of little importance. From the point of view of one of them, the 'nation' as a human convention that stresses division and opposition, a grand reification of ego's I and thou, self and other, is a cause for suffering; it shores up the misapprehension of one's own identity as fixed and permanent. From the viewpoint of Buddhist theory, such identity, like any other concept or object we might name, is a mere husk, without anything permanent or stable about it. At the same time, as other Buddhist teachers might add, it is as real as anything else.

What this study documents, then, is the changing nature of Buddhist subjectivities, whether 'Western' or 'Tibetan,' in the context of translocal migration, exile and tourism. I have specifically focused on the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism has been presented as an object to be observed, reflected upon, and internalized by Western travelers as they meet with Tibetans – also out of place – in the community of Bodhanath on the edges of Kathmandu's urban sprawl. Future research, which I have only hinted at here, might further address the ways in which Tibetans themselves have become increasingly reflective and questioning of what it means to be a Buddhist in the twenty-first century. Despite the presence of Buddhist texts which attest to the transience of 'identity,' learned Tibetan masters and scholars who have long debunked the potent myths of an illusory self, and university academics who recognize the de-centered nature of late modern subjects, the encounters in Bodhanath described here testify to the countervailing desires to locate and fix not only an identity ('Tibetan,' 'Buddhist') but the ideology ('Buddhism') and nation ('Tibet') with which it has been entwined.

Notes

1 Introduction

1 Chorten (*mchod-rten*), the Tibetan gloss for the Sanskrit 'stupa,' literally indicates a support or base (*rten*) for offering or worship (*mchod*). As elsewhere throughout, I use a phoneticized rendering of the Tibetan word, rather than a transliteration, in cases where the Tibetan word is quite well known to non-Tibetan speakers/readers, or where it indicates a proper name.

2 The term pronounced 'lama' (transcribed according to the Wylie system as *bla-ma*) is used throughout this dissertation to denote a Tibetan religious teacher. See notes on transcription at the close of this chapter.

3 Newar and Tamang refer to two ethno-linguistic groups of Nepal; again the use of these categorical labels should not be taken to indicate homogeneous or stable communities. This is particularly true in the case of the term 'Tamang,' for among those people who are so named by outsiders, there may not be recognition of any common identity they hold in common (Levine 1987: 73; see also Holmberg 1989). Newar refers to a particular ethno-linguistic group whose population is concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley. There are both Hindu and Buddhist Newars, the latter having both historic and contemporary links to Tibet through cultural and commercial networks. See Gellner (1992) for an ethnographic account of Buddhist Newar identity and religious practice.

4 The 'initial ordination … is in Pali called *pabbajja*, an expressive word, for it means "going out", that is from home to homelessness' (Gombrich 1988: 106).

5 As I was told by several older Tibetans in Bodhanath, undertaking pilgrimage (*gnas skor brgyab*) to particular sites is most efficacious in particular years: the Bird (*bya*) year is associated with the *bya-rung kha-shor* Chorten in Bodhanath.

6 The roll-call of Tibet-related stories in the popular press is staggering; see Lopez (1998: 1–4).

7 Todorov (1984 [1982]) provides an illuminating discussion of pre-modern logics of difference and their discursive elaborations in his account of the 'Conquest of America.'

8 Although it was not published until after my field research was complete, I have benefited from Scott's *Formations of Ritual* in this section especially.

9 See Gyatso (1993) and Aris (1988) on legitimation (and fraud) in the Tibetan *gter-ma* (treasure) tradition. Also, see Lopez (in Cabezon and Jackson 1996: 217–228) on 'Polemical Literature' as well as Dudjom (1991: 929–933), 'The Shortcomings of Refutation and Proof.'

10 Such mimetics hardly operate in politically neutral fields. Taussig (1993) and Bhabha (1984) foreground the presence of colonial power in their very different analyses of mimesis.

11 For an introduction, see *The Tantric View of Life* (Guenther 1976 [1972]). On its relation to earlier Indian antecedents, and the historical development of 'the Vajrayana,' see Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, Vol. 1.

12 The life of the renowned Tibetan adept Milarepa (Mi-la ras-pa;) provides some famous examples; see Lhalungpa (1984 [1977]). In addition, see the religious tales collected by Surya Das from contemporary Tibetan masters.

2 Emanating bodies in the transnational terrain

1 There have been very few recognized female tulkus in Tibet. The most famous were the emanations of Rdo-rje phags-mo once in residence at Bsam-sding dgon-pa. There are several women tulkus in public teaching roles in exile today. For more on gender ideologies within Tibetan Buddhism and their social ramifications, see Willis (1987).

2 Although I focus on contemporary accounts here, the reincarnate lama has epitomized 'Tibet' and/or 'Lamaism' in many European narratives since at least the early part of this century. See Bishop (1989: 53, 56, 168–169), as well as Lopez (1995; 1998: 86–113).

3 In the following I utilize selective elements of C.S. Peirce's wide-ranging semiotic, such as his discussion of the 'interpretant' of a sign ('representamen') as alluded to here, or his emphasis on the different registers through which signs can relate to their objects (as icon, index and symbol, for instance).

4 Cf. Adams' (1996) work on 'virtual Sherpas.' She notes that 'a virtual reality is not juxtaposed to reality proper; rather, a virtual reality persistently interrupts our versions of reality by imposing on us an awareness of who, and what desire, creates that reality as *more* (or less) real' (1996: 20).

5 Previous work by Wylie (1978), Michael (1982), Samuel (1993) and Goldstein (especially 1973, 1968 and 1989 *passim*) provides detailed information and analysis of the 'rule by reincarnation' in pre-1950 Tibet.

6 Much of the discussion that follows is based on oral commentary heard delivered by Tibetan tulkus in Kathmandu and in the USA. For a useful introduction, see Samuel (1993: 281–286, 493–495).

7 Samuel notes that *sku* 'might better be translated as "planes of existence",' not 'body' (1993: 282), while Guenther has understood this term to represent a particular 'mode' of Being (1995 [1963]: 267, note A). While the three 'Body' scheme is most common in Tibetan Buddhist analysis, there are alternate groupings as well. These include divisions of two, four and five 'Bodies' as expressions of *chos-nyid*. See Tsepak Rigzin (1986), also Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: glossary of enumerations) for a quick account of these schemas; also Guenther (1995 [1963]: 267, note A). There are also further subdivisions of *sprul-sku*, which typologize the forms that an emanation body may take; see Dudjom Rinpoche (1991: 128–138).

8 They were primarily referring to the Karmapa case (see below). I have heard similar comments about the comportment and suitability of tulkus made in connection with the recognition of Steven Seagal, a Hollywood B-grade star, as a tulku in 1997 (Moran 1999).

9 The historical development of the tulku system in Tibet is beyond the scope of this study (see Snellgrove and Richardson 1968, for overview). It is important to note that in the pre-modern period, and even today, tulkus were more commonly found among aristocratic families for obvious reasons.

10 The Kagyu (*bka'-rgyud*) tradition, one of the four major 'sects' (*chos-lugs*) of Tibetan Buddhism, has numerous sub-lineages, of which the most important in terms of adherents today is the Karma Kagyu. See following note.

11 In general, I follow Matthew Kapstein's clarification:

> By *sect*, I mean a religious order that is distinguished from others by virtue of its institutional independence; that is, its unique character is embodied outwardly in the form of an independent hierarchy and administration, independent properties, and a recognizable membership of some sort. A *lineage* on the other hand is a continuous succession of spiritual teachers who have transmitted a given body of knowledge over a period of generations but who need not be affiliated with a common sect.
>
> (Kapstein 1980: 139)

12 It has become current practice for high-ranking tulku candidates – even those from sects other than the Dalai Lama's – to be presented to him. The Dalai Lama's high spiritual status and a perceived lack of sectarian, political and other biases, have made his judgment concerning authentic incarnations nearly unquestioned.
13 *Asia Week* carried a cover story on the controversy on October 20, 2000.
14 The other Karmapa, 'Shamar Rinpoche's candidate' resides in Delhi.
15 Shakya (1998) sheds much light on the Tenth Panchen Rinpoche's Tibetan-nationalist reputation. For an historical account of the Ninth Panchen's extremely strained relations with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's government, and his strategic alliance with Beijing against Lhasa, see Goldstein (1989: 110–120; 252–299).
16 The PRC-installed candidate's Tibetan name is rendered 'Gyaincain' by Beijing, and I follow that usage here, rather than adopt a more phonetic English equivalent, such as 'Gyaltsen.'
17 Bdud-'joms Ye-shes Rdo-rje, Dudjom Rinpoche, was one of the most important Nyingma (*rnying-ma*) lineage holders and masters of the twentieth century. The recognition of his tulkus (there are several) has been contentious (Moran 1999: 49–50). The Nyingma ('Ancient') sect, takes its name from its adherence to the Old Tantras, i.e. those that entered Tibet before the second wave of tantras were brought in beginning in the eleventh century.
18 Chadrel Rinpoche, the head of the search committee from Tashilhunpo monastery, was sentenced to six years in prison in April 1997 for conspiring to split China and for leaking state secrets after he notified the Dalai Lama of his progress in the search for the rebirth of the Panchen Lama (Hilton 1999).
19 According to a report filed by the Tibetan Information Network (June 1, 1996), China's ambassador to the UN, Wu Jiamin, made the first public admission that the boy was being held under government protection because '[he] was at risk of being kidnapped by Tibetan separatists and his security had been threatened' (according to Xinhua News Agency). For a year previous to this, China had officially stated that the whereabouts of the boy and his parents were unknown.
20 Cf. September 2002 edition of *Himal*, dedicated to contemporary Tibet. Several contributors (Heimsath, Pistono) critique the validity of positions that maintain Tibet's culture or its Buddhism have been 'lost' or destroyed by Chinese diktat.
21 Fields (1992 [1981]: 369) notes that 'there are at least a million people in [North] America who call themselves Buddhists.' One wonders if he is merely referring to Buddhist converts.
22 In the late 1980s there was brief mention in the American press of another tulku's discovery; 39-year-old Catherine Burroughs was recognized as the tulku of a sixteenth-century lama by a high-ranking Tibetan lama who initially met her in the USA.
23 See Pico Iyer's review of the film in *Tricycle* (Fall 1994: 86).

24 Interview in *Shambhala Sun*, March/April (1993: 6). Wurlitzer initially had serious doubts about representing 'certain basic Buddhist ideas, such as reincarnation and cause and effect' that he felt could be 'totally misunderstood by 99% of the audience.'

25 The politics of representation were also very apparent when I arrived in Kathmandu in late 1992, just after filming for *Little Buddha* had ended. There had been a public outcry, in the form of small demonstrations and articles in the local media, against the film's title: What was 'little' about the Lord Buddha? See Sharon Hepburn (1996) on this aspect of *Little Buddha*.

26 According to Wurlitzer, who wrote the initial screenplay, this is based on Ashvaghosha's (*c.* 100–200 CE) account of the Buddha's life (*Shambhala Sun*, March/April 1993: 7).

27 For an account of Younghusband's military expedition, in which hundreds of Tibetans were killed, see Shakabpa (1984 [1967]: 205–223); for an interesting analysis of one man's desire to penetrate into Tibet's interior, and the wealth of imagery deployed in narrating this quest, see Lopez (1995: 259–263).

3 Commodities, identities and the aura of the Other

1 Jawalakhel in Patan was the main site for Tibetan refugees arriving in the Kathmandu Valley; there were (and still are, in greatly reduced form) camps in the Pokhara area, Chialsa in Solu-Khumbu, and in the Kali-Gandaki river valley (see Forbes 1989). Current population estimates for Tibetans in Nepal range from 20,000 to 25,000, but these figures are very difficult to verify.

2 In fact, no foreigners are allowed to own land in Nepal, but as a matter of practice some wealthier Tibetans have either found a Nepalese partner to buy the land for them or have themselves 'become' Nepalese by claiming that they are Gurung, Manangi (Nyeshante) or Sherpa by birth. These three ethnic groups, especially the latter two, have a rather high affinity in physical type, culture, religion and language with Tibetans.

3 At the time of this incident there were approximately 50 Nepalese rupees to one US dollar; NRs. 1200 = $24.

4 See Giddens' *Modernity and Self Identity* (1991) for one analysis of how this 'unitary self' has been maintained (not always successfully) in contemporary Western societies.

5 I am thinking here of the highly reflexive style and content of periodicals like *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* and *The Shambhala Sun*; there are also a tremendous number of newsletters, with a much smaller readership. The latter are far less 'critical' and much more focused in their reportage, conveying information about their particular teacher, lineage or community even as they of course help produce that sense of community.

6 For an historical overview of Anglo-American travel writing and perceptions of 'Tibet,' see Bishop's *The Myth of Shangri-la* (1989). Lopez's edited volume *Curators of the Buddha* (1995) addresses the place of academic Buddhology in fostering enduring assumptions about Buddhism and Asian societies, while his *Prisoners of Shangri-la* (1998) explores more popular representations of Tibet and their ramifications.

7 Cf. Samuel (1993) on Tibetan societies – and his critique of 'Tibet' as a monolithic cultural/national entity. See also Klieger's (1988) discussion of the 'constitution of a [Tibetan] national consciousness' in the context of exile, and with regard to tourists.

8 Some Tibetans remarked that 'Inji' was 'not good to say,' but others I spoke with denied that the term was derogatory in any way. Another term *phyi-rgyal-pa* or foreigner, was also used in Bodhanath (cf. Lopez 1995: 274). It could – unlike Inji – denote the several Japanese and Taiwanese travelers, as well as those from Europe or America, that were studying Buddhism in Bodhanath in 1993–1994.

9 In Ivy's analysis of internal Japanese tourism, travel is the means to discover not only the essence of 'Japan,' but of oneself, through the magic of culture-in-its-place. In

Japan (and the United States) national-culture has been situated in the spatially remote and temporally vanishing everyday 'hometown' of popular imagination, an image reinforced by advertising and media representations, as well as by political pronouncements. Contact with such a place – which can only be thought of by those who have never had it, or have left the 'hometown' behind – restores or reminds the returnee, the traveler, of what the nation, and hence oneself, are all about. Cf. Stacey Pigg's (1992) work on the conceptualization of the 'village' and the projects of national development in Nepal.

10 As her title suggests, Crossette's book is a lament and a paean, primarily to Bhutan:

> After visits to Buddhist sites across the subcontinent, I returned again and again to Bhutan for the obvious reason that this was the sole remaining Himalayan Buddhist monarchy, the only laboratory left to us at the end of the twentieth century. And time seemed to be running out there also.
>
> (Crossette 1995: 48–49)

Though perhaps less empirically minded ('laboratory'!) than Crossette, many travelers I met in Nepal seemed to share her opinion of Bhutan as the locus of authentic, unsullied Himalayan Buddhism, especially since they could not afford to go there. Remaining out of reach, its aura remains intact (cf. Benjamin 1969: 243, n. 5).

11 As recounted in the *Mchod-rten chen-po Bya-rung kha-shor-gyi lo-rgyus thos-pas grol-ba*, 'History of the great stupa Jarungkhashor [which] liberates [one] by hearing [it].' See Dowman's translation.

12 This is taken from the back pages following the main text of the *Nepal Handbook* (Moran 1991); this section serves as a consumer catalog of Moon Publications books.

13 See Nowak (1984). She argues that through the establishment of Tibetan schools in exile with a standardized curriculum, and also through explicit appeals to Buddhist identity and the figure of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan nationalism and pan-Tibetan unity have been consciously nurtured by the government-in-exile.

14 See Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), a collection of some of his many essays on the topic, for one perspective on contemporary translocal phenomena.

15 The tourist industry brings in greater monetary gains. Forbes notes that in addition to being the economic 'backbone' of Tibetan livelihood in Nepal, the carpet industry 'has also become the second largest earner of foreign currency in the entire country' (1989: 50). By the late 1990s, rampant overproduction had glutted the European, especially German, market, and the industry was perhaps half the size it had been at its height.

16 For example, in 1994 one Tibetan woman who operated an older shop near the entrance from Bodhanath's main street to the Chorten paid NRs. 5,000 per month (US$100) in rent. Her neighbor, in a slightly larger and newer shop, paid NRs. 8,000 (US$160).

17 Baudrillard (1972) in Poster (1988: 80).

18 Patan, or Lalitpur, is the largely Newar city adjacent to Kathmandu. Thamel is a neighborhood in central Kathmandu, now the center of Nepal's lower budget tourist services.

19 There are also non-Buddhist Westerners who might value Tibetan ritual objects, such as the eclectic 'New Age' pilgrims that Korom (1997: 73–74) refers to. 'New Agers' were referred to derisively by Western Buddhists in Bodhanath on several occasions when I was present. Their 'eclecticism,' and the fact that their 'quest was not bound by the teachings or any given master, lineage, or even religion' (*ibid.*: 75) was precisely

the reason that my Western Buddhist friends defined themselves in opposition to them.

20 Cf. Benjamin's discussion of 'cult value' of ritual art, a value based upon the art object's use in ritual, in contradistinction to art for art's sake (1969: 224–225).

21 Cf. Stewart's (1993) insights regarding the 'collection' in her chapter, 'Objects of Desire.' While the arrangement of an altar does not conform in many respects to her depiction of a 'collection,' there are parallels, notably the link between the collection and its owner, such that the former is seen as indexing the very personality of the latter.

22 See chapter 6, where 'connections' play an important role in Western Buddhist narratives of Buddhist identity and practice.

4 Monasteries, patrons and the presence of money in a spiritualized economy

1 For very brief identifications of the monasteries of Bodhanath *c.* 1992 (a list of sixteen), see Mireille Helffer (1993). My figure includes two monasteries at some walking distance from the Chorten towards Jorpati, as well as Kopan – very important for its attention to Western Buddhists – and a small Gelugpa institution, the *grwa-tsang* ('college' or monastic sub-division) of *Srad Brgyud*, among others that have sprung up since her study.

2 Called in Tibetan an 'ani-gompa' (*a-ni dgon-pa*). On the question of women monastics and their place in Tibetan society, see Aziz, Tsomo and Willis' contributions to the edited volume *Feminine Ground* (Willis 1987). Here I will use the term 'nun' to convey the Tibetan term *ani*. The order of bhiksuni, fully-ordained women monastics, never existed in Tibet, though it should also be remembered that the majority of Tibetan monks were, and remain, 'novices' and not fully-ordained bhiksu.

3 Helffer lists its name as *Bkra-shis chos-'phel gling*. In any event, I never heard anyone refer to it as anything other than 'Thrangu gompa,' indicating that most Tibetans and Western visitors refer to this monastery, and most others in Kathmandu, by the name of the foremost tulku, or monastery founder, in residence there. Thrangu Rinpoche, a renowned scholar and abbot (*mkhan-po*), takes his appellation from the name of his incarnation line, and by extension, the name of the monastery in Eastern Tibet where these tulkus had their seat.

4 As Tibetan businessmen often told me, it is impossible for foreigners to own land under Nepalese law, but there are also various ways around this. One 30-year-old Tibetan man referred to the Chini Lama's family as the 'landlord' (*sa-bdag*) of Bodhanath, and he suggested that much of the land being developed and built on by Tibetans in Kathmandu, whether for multi-unit dwellings or monasteries, was in fact usufruct only.

5 Goldstein's works (1968, 1971 and 1986) are all directly concerned with monastic demesne holdings and the status of Tibetans 'attached' to this land; see also Carrasco (1959), and for overview, Stein (1972 [1962]: 125–146).

6 This 'medical center' would one day have both Tibetan and Western doctors in attendance, I was told. The rituals performed were intended to suppress negative influences that might harm the site or interrupt the progress of construction. The rites included the benediction of a tutelary deity through a human medium (Tib. *lha-babs*) and a bonfire offering/purification (*gtor-rgyab*) on the final day of the ceremonies.

7 Cf. Adams (1996: 124–125, 164–165) with regard to Sherpa jindaks. Also Kapstein (1997: 356): 'Extravagant generosity in this [religious] context could actually promote the advancement of one's social status, much as "conspicuous consumption" is thought sometimes to do in modern consumerist societies.'

8 The *sbyin-bdag* 'dyad,' which Klieger terms a 'long term patron/client relationship … between secular and clerical elements in traditional Tibetan society' (1989: vii–viii), is at the heart of his analysis of Tibetan ethnic identity in exile. He contends that Tibetanness is maintained through an 'oppositional process' of negotiating this identity *vis-à-vis* outsiders/benefactors, i.e. the patron–client relationship.

9 Doing research in a monastery in South India in the 1970s, Donald Lopez remarks, 'I was frequently invited by individual monks to elaborate meals which ended in the request that I become their "sponsor," one of the few English words they knew' (1995: 274).

10 The Tibetan Buddhist term *'dul-wa* is used to describe how non-Buddhist 'barbarians,' such as they themselves, were 'tamed', 'conquered' or 'converted' by the introduction of the Dharma into the Land of Snows beginning in the seventh century. Significantly, the term also refers to the Vinaya section of the *Bka'-'gyur*. Samuel (1993: 196, 219), following Jaschke, also notes these and other usages of *'dul-wa*, in particular its connotation of 'civilizing.'

11 Cf. Franz-Karl Ehrhard's *Views of the Bodhnath-Stupa* (1991), which presents a short history of the Chorten, including selections from relevant Tibetan texts and reproductions of line drawings. Erhard writes that:

> it was only after the Nepal-Tibet wars in the 18th and 19th centuries that these ties [between the Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley and the incarnation lineage of the *Yol-mo-ba sprul-sku* as sextons of the Chorten] were broken; finally, in the year 1859, Chini Tefi Sim Lama was installed as the 'priest' of the Shri Bauddhanath Shrine.
>
> (Erhard 1991: 6)

12 Snellgrove (1981 [1961]) describes many of these areas (primarily in the late 1950s when he first visited them); Nepal's Solu-Khumbu (aka 'Shorung') is home to many Sherpas; Solu is the more southern part of this area.

13 Shechen gompa built an affiliated guest house in the late 1990s.

14 'Moral Authority of the Sangha and Modernity in Thailand: Sexual Scandals, Sectarian Dissent, and Political Resistance' (1997 version of as yet unpublished MS).

15 Thus one monk told me that all the monks at his monastery had to provide their own clothing, and the monastery provided most food. Out of NRs. 100 that he might be given in return for '*zhabs-brtan*,' he would have to give 20 to the gompa. Though often referred to generically as *zhabs-brtan*, this term more specifically refers to prayers aimed at prolonging the life of a lama. For more on the *zhabs-brtan* literature, see Cabezon (1996).

16 A mandala is a prominent fixture in Tibetan Buddhist ritual pratice; the Tibetan equivalent literally means 'center' (*dkyil*) and 'circle' or 'surround' (*'khor*). *Mandala* is also the name of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition's newsletter; the FPMT's 'center' is Kopan monastery.

17 From a pamphlet entitled 'Kopan 93 Program of Buddhist Studies.' The figure of 200 monks was given to me by a monk acquaintance at Kopan in 2000.

18 This, according to Yvonne, who has worked with FPMT for over a decade; another source told me there were sixty-four centers worldwide.

19 A British woman involved in organizing the 1993 course gave me this figure; a British man in attendance told me that there were 178 on the first day of teaching, but that more came for the second two weeks when Lama Zopa himself was teaching. According to a friend who attended, there were over a hundred people at the November course ten years earlier, in 1983.

20 From 'the talk Lama Yeshe gave to the CPMT meeting at Instituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Italy, in January, 1983. Edited by Nicholas Ribush' (http://www.fpmt.org/Organization/advice01.html), accessed on July 11, 1998.

21 Tulku Urgyen left Tibet for Sikkim in the mid-1950s; his lineage and history are treated in Tobgyal (1988 [1982]: 43). Several of his sons have been recognized as tulkus, including Chökyi Nyima, in the Drikung Kagyu sectarian lineage, and Choling (Mchog-gling) Rinpoche, as one of the rebirths of the great tertön Chogyur Lingpa.

22 Tulku Urgyen established the first small retreat gompa at Pharphing (Tib. *Yang-le-shod*), an hour's drive south of Kathmandu; many other Tibetan masters later established their own retreat centers there. He also reconstructed the old ani-gompa (Nagi Gompa), or nunnery, along the northern rim of the Kathmandu Valley and spent much of his later life there. With his son Tsoknyi (Tshogs-gnyis) Rinpoche, he also established a monastery on a prominent hill behind Swayambhunath.

23 I met more than a few Western visitors who had been directed by a sympathetic Tibetan or Western Buddhist to the 'big white gompa' in Bodhanath (as Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling is often known) to see Tulku Chökyi Nyima when they had questions about Tibetan Buddhism.

24 At that time, when he had fewer students and more time, Tulku Chökyi Nyima often asked neophytes if they would like to borrow English-language books about Buddhism from his library in order to establish a certain baseline of familiarity with Buddhism. He then invited them to return with questions or concerns about what they read. Here note the way in which the book functions as an entry into Buddhism, by making explicit what is taken for granted by some Tibetans, and by systematizing the Dharma in a form that Western 'students' are prepared, indeed, expecting to receive. See chapter 7.

25 These teaching events are called the 'Namo Buddha seminar,' after the important Buddhist site above the Kathmandu Valley where Thrangu Rinpoche has established a retreat center.

26 Personal communication with Tibetan language teacher Gen Ngawang.

27 Thrangu Rinpoche also founded the Mangal Dvip primary school in Bodhanath, educating some 200 young Nepali and Tibetan children; established a three-year retreat site and monastic college ('shedra;' *shes-grwa*) at Namo Buddha (*Stag-mo lus-sbyin*) on the rim of the Kathmandu Valley; and began building the 'Sarnath Institute for Advanced Buddhist Studies' (a large shedra) outside Benares in late 1993.

28 See chapter 5 for more on the international significance of Buddhist nuns.

29 There was considerable ambiguity regarding the Guomindang's relationship to Tibet especially as Tibet was viewed by the Republicans at various points as an ally (against the CCP) *and* as a vassal state. (cf. Smith 1996: 247-250)

30 An 'outer biography' (*phyi-ba'i rnam-thar*) is concerned with the public and observable aspects of an actor's life (Gyatso 1997: 369); Gyatso's book-length translation of Jigme Lingpa's 'secret autobiography' is *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (1998).

31 Recall the fear of outside, i.e. foreign, interference in the process of tulku selection mentioned in chapter 2. Tibetan acceptance of foreign patrons under the cloak of a special type of jindak relationship, known as *mchod-yon* (often translated as 'priest-patron'), played a prominent role in Tibetan statecraft. See Klieger (1989); Sperling (1980).

5 Talking about monks

1 Both Bogle and Turner were sent to Tibet on behalf of the British East India Company (Bishop 1989).

2 According to the typical Tibetan reckoning, these vows and pledges each accord to one of the respective three 'vehicles' (*thegs pa*) of Buddhism and regulate the practitioner's behavior and attitudes; designated by their Sanskrit names they are the Hinayana pratimoksa; Mahayana bodhicitta; Vajrayana samaya.

3 Hunger strikes were used by the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) in the 1990s to induce a sense of moral responsibility in viewers; press releases have often painted the existence of the strikers and the TYC itself as a sign of some Tibetans' frustration with the purely peaceful (and religiously sanctioned) approach to regaining the nation as epitomized by the Dalai Lama.

4 The painting from which the card is reproduced is by T. Sherab, whom I was told is himself 'a monk in one of the Gelugpa monasteries of South India.'

5 So too have some 'disturbances' in what Tibetans call Kham and Amdo (largely Tibetan areas within Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai provinces), areas that are not part of what China refers to as 'Xizang' or the Tibet Autonomous Region. These eastern areas might be termed 'ethnographic' Tibet as opposed to 'political' Tibet (TAR) for clarity's sake (Goldstein 1994: 77, following Richardson's usage); they have very different political, social and economic histories and were under at least the nominal control of China long before the establishment of the PRC (*ibid*.: 76–90).

6 This is based on conversations with monks in Nepal and India. Cf. Ellen Bruno's film *Satya: A Prayer for the Enemy*, which presents Tibetan nuns' accounts of their political struggles and the resulting torture and imprisonment they endured. Adams has examined the testimony of these nuns in 'Suffering the Winds of Lhasa: Politicized Bodies, Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and Humanism in Tibet' (unpublished MS).

7 In July and August of 1996, Ganden, Sera and Drepung monasteries were targeted as test sites for the 'patriotic re-education' and re-organization of Tibetan monasteries, according to a Reuters report from Beijing quoted by the London-based Tibet Information Network (TIN) on-line, September 18, 1996. This 'tougher policy towards monks and nuns' apparently had its roots in the 'Third Forum on Work in Tibet,' held in Beijing in July 1994 (TIN News Update, March 4, 1996); the 're-education' classes continue to be held regularly in many monastic institutions in Tibet.

8 'Written Statement by the Spokesman of Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Communities,' October 30, 1996, in World Tibet News (archived at http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html); emphasis mine.

9 Ironically, there often seems to be more religious and cultural autonomy in Tibetan areas outside the TAR itself (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998). Yet even outside the TAR, the rise of popular religious leaders and movements has been closely watched, and curtailed when deemed dangerous (Pistono 2002).

10 'In most of the demonstrations that have taken place in Tibet since the autumn of 1987 young nuns have been very active. About half have been organized by nuns alone' (Havnevik 1994: 259).

11 The letter from which this is excerpted is dated in the pamphlet as January 26, 1990.

12 Presumably the nuns would take their full vows (some 350 plus) in the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition that is transmitted via Hong Kong or Taiwanese nuns.

13 I am thinking here of reports that were issued after the 1993 conference between Western Buddhist teachers (several of whom were Buddhist nuns) and the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, as well as discussions that I had with three Western women in Bodhanath about Tibetan anis and 'patriarchy.'

14 Cf. Laura Markowitz' 'It's Not Our Karma: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka Call for Equality.'

15 Shechen has greatly changed since Crossette's visit: the outer grounds have been planted and landscaped, and it has added a number of outer buildings.

16 *Dag-snang* refers to a Tantric approach toward experiencing the world; one does not attempt to remake one's experience, but rather to see phenomena as they truly are, 'pure' in and of themselves.
17 The more or less rigid separation and privileged placing of a transcendent realm over the profane world has been a hallmark of all 'world religions' since Weber, and has been used as a way of differentiating them from 'traditional,' i.e. local, religious practices and cosmologies. See Hefner (1993: 3–44) for a recent critical evaluation of this dualism.
18 'The paradox of all rational asceticism, which in an identical manner has made monks in all ages stumble, is that rational asceticism itself has created the very wealth it rejected' (Weber [1915] in Gerth and Mills 1946: 332). Weber characterized varieties of world rejection as falling along a polar continuum between 'mysticism' and 'asceticism' for analytical purposes (*ibid.*: 323–359). In practice, various Tibetan Buddhist socio-religious roles, both lay and celibate, confound any easy categorization in these terms.
19 See, for example, Tambiah (1984).
20 Goldstein and Tsarong's 'Tibetan Buddhist Monasticism,' a case study of the 'Kyilung' monastery in Ladakh, yields insight into the daily activities of monks in a relatively rural setting, from how they enter the gompa in the first place to their means of subsistence and work practices within the monastery, and finally their relationship with local laity.
21 Cf. Gombrich and Obeyesekere on the link between Buddhist 'modernism' or (even 'rationalism') in Sri Lanka with the elite (monastic) understanding of the Dhamma: both treat the Buddhism as practiced by the masses as debased.
22 As presented by WTN News, archived at http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html.
23 It appears that these regulations are very strictly enforced in many other monasteries, perhaps more so now. Cf. WTN News, October 31, 1998 (archived at http://www.tibet.ca/english/index.html).
24 'Forcible Retirement of Monks Threatens Buddhist Tradition,' WTN News, *op cit.*
25 See Goldstein (1982) on the use of ribald and satirical songs as social commentary in Lhasa. The objects of derision included Tibetan aristocrats as well as monastic officials, i.e. public figures; nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that notable 'bad' monks were not also subject to gossip and public censure in the period preceding the Chinese invasion.
26 Cf. Adams (1996: especially 39–58) for a detailed analysis of 'Sherpa' as mobile signifier, and on the construction of 'Buddhism' as 'transnational currency' (ibid.:54). She reproduces the Drepung monk advertisement discussed here on p. 50 of her text.
27 *New York Times* (Mark Lander, writer), April 17, 1998.
28 *New York Times*, February 1, 1998.
29 Giddens (1991) notes the import of the (auto)biographical genre as a hallmark of modernity, a sign of our reflection upon – and a tool for reinforcing – our lives as meaningful, thoroughly individuated, and always a work in progress. I agree with his assessment, but would caution against his apparent inference (following Lyons [1978]) that other places and other times have never developed this genre (1991: 76). As Janet Gyatso's (especially 1998) work makes plain, the (auto)biography was, and continues to be an important literary work in Tibetan cultural areas, though not identical to Giddens' modern form.

6 Identifying narratives

1 Although it is not expressly addressed here, I am influenced by Freud's discussion of the *umheimlich*, the un-home-like or uncanny, and by its elaboration in Ivy (1995), Bammer (1992) and Taylor (1992).

2 This is the way in which I heard Tibetans use the term, albeit infrequently. Cf. Ugen Gombo (1985: 225).
3 In her usage, 'connection' (which might be more literally rendered in Tibetan as *'brel-ba*) is seemingly a gloss for the Tibetan word *rten-'brel*, itself an abbreviation of *rten-cing 'brel-pa 'byung-ba*, Skt. pratityasamutpada, interdependent origination. In ordinary Tibetan speech *rten-'brel* connotes a coincidence of events or interactions, usually happy or auspicious (*bkra-shis*) in nature. Though usually unexamined, the cause for this coincidence is not 'chance' but rather the workings of interdependent origination: the coming together of certain conditions and causes at the same time so as to produce a given effect or effects. The concatenation of such conditions is ultimately the result of previous relationships or activity (*las*; Skt. karma).
4 See Ortner (1989: 100, 138–143) on the founding of this monastery in 1923, and more generally, for a 'cultural and political history' of this Sherpa region and its Buddhism.
5 For example, the quarterly *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* includes a 'Dharma Center Directory' at the back of each issue; it 'offers this section as a service to our readers. It is designed to encourage individuals to learn more about Buddhist practice and to help them locate centers in their area' (Winter 1997, vol. 7, 2: 118). In addition, the magazine devotes considerable space to numerous advertisements for books, dharma-objects (prayer beads, meditation cushions, statuary, etc.), retreat places and teaching events – mostly in the USA – thus encouraging readers to study, read and practice Buddhism, but also to buy.
6 These include the School for International Training's semester abroad, the University of Wisconsin's college year in Nepal, Sojourn Nepal (for high school or post-high school students), and the explicitly Buddhist-oriented programs run by Antioch College in Bodh Gaya, and Naropa Institute (established by Tibetan lama Trungpa Rinpoche in Boulder, CO) in Bodhanath. In 1999, I became director of the Trinity College semester-abroad program in Kathmandu.
7 See Keyes (1975) for a less text-centered view of religious community and the imagination of Buddhist subjectivities/moral community through discourses concerned with sacred space/time.
8 The full Tibetan term would be *tshogs-'khor* (Skt. ganacakra), referring to the ritual group-assembly itself. Most Western Buddhists I spoke with refer to the practice, the group, and the offering as simply 'tshog.'
9 The finer points of *tshogs-'khor* and *dbang* are outside of my concern here (see Beyer's 1973 *Cult of Tara* for probably the fullest ethnographic analysis of specific performances of rites within these genres). The structure of dbang ritual will be discussed briefly in the next chapter. In the USA, *tshogs-'khor* events (monthly or bi-monthly) often figure prominently in the community life of individual Dharma centers; unlike *dbang*, they do not require the presence of a lama.
10 *Dam-tshig* 'pledges' are of great importance in Vajrayana Buddhism. This discussion is based on oral explanations from Tulku Urgyen and Tulku Chökyi Nyima.
11 I do not mean to suggest that all – or even most – Western Buddhists are 'sectarian', or that Tibetan Buddhists are not; the point is that the positions occupied by each in relation to 'Buddhism' and being a 'Buddhist' are not transposable, as will be taken up in detail in the next chapter.
12 Both Naropa and Maitripa were gurus of the famous Tibetan master, Marpa.
13 There are numerous examples from within authoritative Tibetan Buddhist works that echo Neil's remarks; no doubt he was familiar with some of them at least. For overview, see Samuel (1993: 406–435, 518–524).

7 Producing (Western) Buddhists

1 As discussed in chapter 6, for example, David-Neel's *My Journey to Lhasa* and *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*; Hesse's *Siddartha* and *Journey to the East*; Mathiessen's *The Snow Leopard*; Parahamsa's *Autobiography of a Yogi*; and others. For an early satirical response to this genre (and the movements it inspired), see Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola*.

2 The *Torch of Certainty* (*Nges-don sgron-me*), by 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul (trans. Hanson 1977). *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Dam-chos yid-bzhin nor-bu thar-pa rin-po-che'i rgyan]*), by Sgam-po-pa (trans. Guenther 1986 [1959]). Both texts present the Buddhist path in normative terms, as a program to be followed, according to the tradition of the Kagyupa.

3 While it is impossible to summarize these developments, I am referring to works as varied as Asad (1973), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Lavie (1990), Marcus and Fischer (1986), Mohanty (1988) in 'anthropology' alone, to say nothing of its antecedents in philosophy, feminist theory and history.

4 For example, Almond (1988); Lopez (1995, edited volume); Tweed (1992). Scott (1994) examines the powerful and often unreflected upon discourses concerned with Buddhism, demonology and 'the Sinhalese' in anthropological investigations.

5 I have served as academic director of the later development of this shedra, now re-organized as the Center for Buddhist Studies and affiliated with Kathmandu University, since 2001.

6 As the authoritative *Kun-bzang bla-ma'i zhal-lung* notes, 'In all the Sutras, Tantras and commentaries, it is not said that there is [even one] account of accomplishing Buddhahood without relying upon a teacher' (my translation of Dpal-sprul 1988: 215).

7 Samuel (1993: 244–257). In addition, the term 'lama' is also used in Vajrayana to refer to an internal experience of enlightened awareness; from this perspective, the inner lama is a more profound manifestation of the provisional external guru.

8 For example, the *Kun-bzang bla-ma'i zhal-lung* lists the 'three faults of the vessel, [the vessel's] six stains, and [the vessel's] five misapprehensions' all in the context of 'conduct to be abandoned while listening to the Dharma' (my translation of Dpal-sprul 1988: 11–19).

9 This is based on personal communication from Tibetans and Westerners in Dharamsala; it is probable that these occasions are rarer as the Dalai Lama spends much of the year traveling abroad for religious and diplomatic purposes.

10 Phowa is a meditational exercise that allows for the transference of one's (or more elaborately, another's) consciousness to a pure realm at the time of death. The visualization and physical techniques of phowa must be learned and practiced well before the crisis of death ensues; its pragmatic function for older lay people is obvious, then.

11 Thrangu Rinpoche also taught in the afternoons, both on 'mind training' (*Blo-sbyong*) and in separate sessions on 'restricted' (i.e. advanced esoteric) Vajrayana practices for a small group who had completed the proper prerequisites.

12 In Tibetan it is more literally 'to go for refuge' (*skyab-su mchi-ba*; *skyabs-su 'gro-ba*).

13 According to their 'Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation' in the Winter 1997 issue (p. 117), *Tricycle* averaged 43,859 paid subscriptions for each of the three previous 1997 issues.

14 Klinger (1980) discusses the earliest mention of both the *trisharana* (the refuge formula) and *sharanagamana* ('taking refuge') in Pali canonical sources in his wider discussion of the Tibetan 'fourth' refuge, the guru. He is inclined to see the taking of refuge as initially applying only to lay disciples of the Buddha, and only later to members of the Sangha. A close reading of *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (trans. Guenther 1986 [1959]: 99–111) indicates that at least in this text, taking refuge is the foundational practice for all those who take up further commitments, whether monk,

nun, novice or lay vows; the understanding of refuge also varies significantly depending on whether one is of the Hinayana or an aspirant to the 'Mahayana family.'

15 There are different Tibetan versions of refuge, in particular there are the 'outer, inner, and secret' refuges (see Guenther 1986 [1959]; Norbu 1993 [1977]). Even among these, the wording may vary. My interlocutor here recited a well-known 'outer' form: *Sangs-rgyas chos dang tshogs-kyi mchog-rnams-la byang-chub bar-du bdag-ni skyabs-su mchi*.

16 Some early observers of Tibetan Buddhism (including Western travelers and 'scholars' such as Austine Waddell, and the Japanese pilgrim-monk Ekai Kawaguchi) were dismayed by the rites they witnessed, seeing them as little more than superstitious mummery. Beyer's *Magic and Ritual in Tibet: The Cult of Tara* (1973) still provides the fullest account of Vajrayana ritual theory and praxis in English, focusing particularly upon those rites associated with the Saviouress (Sgrol-ma; Skt. Tara).

17 Neither the *'cham* (see Stein 1972 [1962]: 189–190 for overview) nor the *gtor-rgyab* requires public observance for its efficacy, while the very *raison d'être* of the *mani khadon* I witnessed was to harness the public's ability to recite, *en masse*, the six-syllables of the Lord of Compassion (Spyan-ras-gzigs (Skt. Avalokitesvara) as Thugs-rje chen-po).

18 If any distinction is useful, it might be that rites primarily aimed at meditative realization and accomplishment are normally performed individually and in solitary places. Here my focus is on public performance by lamas and how lay Tibetans and Westerners take up positions in ritual contexts relative to the lama.

19 Geoffrey Samuel's analysis in *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (1993) differentiates three 'orientations': Bodhi (concerned with the highest soteriological aims of Buddhism, Spiro's 'nibbanic'); Karma (concerned with normative conduct and future rewards for moral behavior, Spiro's 'kammatic'), and Pragmatic (concerned with more immediate rewards and results in this life, which Spiro places beyond the pale of 'Buddhism' at least in the Burmese setting).

20 Allusions to the multiplicity of peoples' capacities and motivations are found throughout Tibetan Buddhist texts. Merely in the context of taking refuge and aspiring to enlightenment see, for example, Guenther (Sgam-po-pa) (1986 [1959]); Dpal-sprul (1988); Richards (Pha-bong-kha) (1991). While written from the perspective of different sectarian traditions, each of these presents an overview of the Buddhist Path in its entirety.

21 There are a number of Tibetan terms that are used to refer to 'initiation,' 'permission' and 'empowerment' rites, and they are used slightly differently across sectarian lineages (see Beyer 1988 [1973]: 401–403). During the drupchen discussed above, for example, there are opportunities for practitioners to undertake what is called the 'self-initiation' or 'path-empowerment.' There is also the permission-entrustment (*bka'-gtad*) that Beyer refers to, which allows a practitioner to undertake particular meditative exercises associated with a particular deity. For a critical and illuminating discussion of the issues involved in empowerment, see *Empowerment*, a translation of Rtse-le Rgod-tshang-pa Sna-tshogs Rang-grol's (b. 1608) writings on the subject by Erik Pema Kunsang (1993). Snellgrove (1987: 213–270) contains the best historical account of the development of this ritual genre and its complexities. Wayman (1990 [1973]: 54–68) and Lessing and Wayman (1980 [1968]) provide a translation of Mkhas-grub rje's authoritative discussion of empowerment.

22 This recitation is usually done at breakneck speed, thus foregrounding the productivity of recitation in and of itself, with no attention paid to the language as referential (i.e. consciously 'meaningful'). Alongside a highly developed hermeneutic tradition, Tibetan Buddhism also adheres to the intrinsic power of the word.

23 In the actual context of a dbang/lung ceremonial, there is little if any explicit instruction as to how one undertakes the practices that one has been given permission to

perform. Such vital instruction (*khrid*) must be received in a separate context from a qualified master.

24 The drupchen ritual does not seem to exist within either Gelug or Sakya lineages, nor is it practiced in all of the Nyingma and Kagyu monasteries of Bodhanath. This is probably due to the demands of the ritual and the need for a relatively large body of specialists in order to undertake it.

25 Among the 'four branches of ritual service and attainment,' the drupchen (*sgrub-chen*) is the fourth, or culminating aspect. See Dorje and Kapstein (1991: 125).

26 These were the *Sngag-gso* and *Tshe-dkar sgrub-chen* at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling and the *Tshogs-chen 'dus-pa sgrub-chen* at Shechen.

27 This particular drupchen, called the *Sngags-kyi gso-sbyong* (from the *Mchog-gling gter-gsar*), is performed several times yearly if possible at Ka-Nying Shedrup Ling and/or affiliated monasteries as per the instructions of Tulku Urgyen.

28 At Shechen, there were fewer foreigners. This may be due to the fact that the revered Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who attracted numerous Western disciples, had passed away in 1991. Nevertheless, the ritual schedule of the monastery for a several-month period (including the *Tshogs-'dus* drupchen) was posted in English on the monastery door in 1994.

29 For a useful discussion of the possible 'categories' and their fluidity, see Samuel (1993: 278–289 and *passim*). As he notes, 'the variety of possible [religious] roles and careers is itself a significant characteristic of Tibetan societies as opposed to the situation elsewhere in the Buddhist world' (*ibid.*: 278).

8 Dharma and difference

1 Although all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism would accept such a statement, it is in fact subtle differences about the 'correct view of emptiness' that lead to some of the fiercest polemics between sectarian traditions (see Lopez 1996: 217–228).

2 Guenther notes that the ordinary Tibetan meaning of the term *dran-pa* is 'memory, remembrance, recollection,' but in the context of meditation he finds reason to translate it as 'introspection' (1986 [1959]: 229–230). See also Gyatso's edited volume (1992) that explicitly addresses the context-dependent interpretations of *dran-pa*/smriti.

3 There is thus the well-known classification of *bskyed-rim*, the generation stage in which deity and mandala are brought forth mentally, and *rdzogs-rim*, or completion stage, generally said to be without constructs.

4 Nevertheless, it is still the case that nearly all lamas instruct their disciples to engage in practices gradually, starting with the preliminaries (*sngon-'gro*) or with gaining some stability in basic meditation. Full knowledge about advanced practices depends on the lama's instructions (*man-ngag*); texts will not suffice.

5 These texts are generally different from the sorts of literature that Western Buddhists use in their meditation practices (i.e. sadhana texts). They are to be recited and do not usually involve the reader's visualized transformation into a deity (i.e. they do not involve generation and completion stage deity yoga). Instead, they are most frequently 'praises' (*bstod-pa*) to Sgrol-ma, Spyan-ras-gzigs or Dpal-ldan lha-mo, for example; many recitation booklets include long-life prayers for the Dalai Lama and/or lineage holders of various sectarian traditions, as well as the prayer for the swift reclamation of Tibet (*bden-tshig smon-lam*).

6 What Tashi is referring to as ngöndro (*sngon-'gro*) are the 'special inner preliminary practices' made up of over one hundred thousand repetitions of each of the following: prostrations, purification mantras, visualized mandala offerings and supplications to the Guru. This is undertaken in many sectarian traditions before beginning 'higher' Tantric meditational practices. The majority of the *Kun-bzang bla-ma'i zhal-lung* (Dpal-

sprul 1988) is a manual for these and the 'common outer preliminaries' according to the *Klong-chen snying-thig* lineage. The *Torch of Certainty* describes them from the perspective of the Kagyu tradition.

7 'Mani(s)' and 'benza guru' refer to two widely known and popularly recited mantras, the mantra of Chenresi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and Patron of Tibet, and the mantra of Tibet's 'second Buddha,' the Vajrayana master Guru Rinpoche, respectively.

8 There were certainly exceptions to this, particularly with regard to the notion of karma. Two Western women, one of whom was an ordained monastic, told me on separate occasions that it was 'thinking about karma that really motivated' them to practice meditation and go into retreat.

9 See Martin *et al.* (1988) for Foucauldian reflections on varied Western 'technologies of the self.' See also Kapstein's (1996) brief discussion of traditional 'Tibetan technologies of the self.'

10 The description of the relationship between deity and practitioner here is generalized, to say the least. This relationship is differently envisaged and experienced according to the class of practices engaged in, for example as Dudjom Rinpoche (1991) discusses in his overview of the six ascending classes of Secret Mantra according to the Nyingmapa.

11 Tibetans themselves rarely if ever refer to the Dharma in this way, as might be recalled from my discussion 'On Buddhism' in the Introduction. The topic of the Dharma's universality, to which this sort of discourse is directly related, will be taken up below.

12 The *Kun-bzang bla-ma* refers to prostration in the section concerned with the 'seven-limb offering' (*yan-lag bdun-pa*). It mentions the practice as an 'antidote for pride' (Dpal-sprul 1988: 512) and provides a detailed description of how it should be undertaken. In that context, it is clear that the best prostration is meant to be not only performed by the body, but with the speech reciting prayers or the refuge formula, and with the mind visualizing all sentient beings as making prostrations to the objects of refuge along with the practitioner.

13 We might also recall Tulku Chökyi Nyima's remarks, quoted earlier in this chapter, that were presumably delivered in order to undermine definitive Western assumptions like this about who is, and who is not, a 'Buddhist.'

14 I neglected to mention to him that monks from several of the rebuilt gompas of South India go on tour to North America and Europe almost yearly, as a way of fundraising for their particular monastic colleges. In order to support its monks, Rato monastery, in Mundgod, Karnataka, has taken to producing 'cotton and silk home furnishings' for boutiques in Paris and New York. This endeavor has been directed by an American monk with connections to the world of haute couture who has been in residence there for many years (*New York Times*, July 14, 1998).

15 See Nowak 1984 (particularly pp. 111–113, 130–131) as regards new attitudes toward the Dharma among the young, and new opportunities for lay Tibetan study of Buddhism in India.

16 Unlike most of my interviews with Tibetans, this was conducted almost exclusively in English (November 14, 1993).

17 Adams (1996) details similar circumstances in which Sherpas come face to face with academic, state and transnational representations of 'Sherpas.'

18 This is not new (see Nowak 1984), but recent developments surrounding the long-simmering 'protector deity' controversy, and the immolation suicide of Thubten Ngödrup following a Tibetan 'hunger strike to the death' protest, have been reported to international audiences unaccustomed to such troubling representations of 'Tibet' (*Time*, May 11, 1998; April 20, 1998).

9 Tibetan Buddhism

1 Lopez (1994).

2 Given the keen interest in Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan, and to a lesser degree in India and Japan, it would not be surprising to find 'Tibet' representing a structurally similar place – as ancient wisdom antidote to problematic modernities – in the East as well.

3 Lopez (1998: 274, n. 51) cites Robert Thurman's similarly teleological remarks in his own deconstructions of utopian Tibet.

4 Tashi opined that, these days, Tibetans are often known first and foremost as Buddhists, and then as refugees.

5 That is, not only does Buddhism – as the most privileged part of Tibetan culture – become the natural essence of Tibetans, but it also in fact can become a universal nature accessible to all humanity. Cf. Malkki's (1995: 12–17) discussion of 'culture' in light of work by Balibar and Wallerstein, among others.

6 As discussed in chapter 8, meditation has never been a widespread practice among Tibetan laity, nor among any other Asian population. See Kapstein (1996) for a very brief review of 'the systematic approaches to liberation through meditation and yoga' (ibid.:276) in the principal Tibetan instructional lineages.

7 Debates about these innovations on, or strayings from, tradition are ubiquitous in *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, for example.

8 On Buddhist modernism, aka 'Protestant Buddhism,' see Gombrich (1988); Bechert and Gombrich (1984).

9 As in the recent Hollywood films *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Kundun* respectively.

10 This has been a particular focus of the Amnye Machen Institute in Dharamsala, a non-governmental Tibetan organization committed to cultural awareness of 'other' aspects of Tibetan life besides scholastic Buddhism, and to exploring 'real' democracy in the Tibetan communities-in-exile. This has also been among the aims of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), operational since the 1970s as a political activist organization. The TYC has actively promoted discussion of non-pacific methods of political struggle to regain the homeland, and launched the hunger strikes of 1998 in New Delhi.

11 As quoted in 'The Politics of Shangri-La: John Keating Kearney Uncovers the Myths Behind the Free Tibet Movement,' as reprinted on the World Tibet News (WTN), http://www.tibet.ca, for July 16, 1998.

12 This trope of imprisonment is also utilized by Lopez (1998) in examining Western representations of Tibet and Buddhism. See in particular his final chapter, 'The Prison.'

13 From Agence France Presse (catalogued at WTN, http://www.tibet.ca, for October 30, 1996).

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